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THE WILD HUNTRESS; or, THE BIG SQUATTER'S VENGEANCE.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN," "THE DEATH-SHOT," "THE SCALP HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.



A GRIM SMILE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS SATISFIED WITH HIS EFFORT IN MAKING A HUMAN TARGET

The Wild Huntress;

The Big Squatter's Vengeance.

OR,

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,
AUTHOR OF "THE RIFLE RANGERS," "THE SCALP
HUNTERS," "THE WHITE CHIEF," "THE
WHITE TRAIL," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A SPLENDID PENSION.

THE treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was followed by an extensive *debandement*, which sent many thousands of sabers ringing back into their scabbards. A three years' campaign under the sultry skies of Mexico had satisfied the ambition of most. It was only those who arrived late upon the field—too late to pluck a laurel—who would have prolonged the strife.

The narrator of this tale, Edward Warfield—*ci-devant* captain of a corps of rangers—was not one of the last mentioned. I was tired of the toils of war, and really desired a spell of peace. My wishes were in similitude with those of the poet, who longed "for a lodge in some vast wilderness—some boundless contiguity of shade."

I had been long enough in the wilderness, to know that even a dwelling in the desert cannot be maintained without expense. We were dismissed without pension; the only reward for our warlike achievements being a piece of land scrip, good for the number of acres upon the face of it—to be selected from government land, wherever the holder might choose to locate. The scrip was for greater or less amount, according to the term of the receiver's service. Mine represented a section of six hundred and forty acres. This bit of scrip then—a tried steed that had carried me many a long mile, and through the smoke of more than one red fray—a true rifle, that I had myself carried equally as far—a pair of Colt's pistols—and a steel of Toledo, taken at the storming of Chapultepec—constituted the bulk of my available property. Add to this, a remnant of my last month's pay—in truth, not enough to provide me with that much coveted article, a civilian's suit; in proof of which, my old undress-frock, with its yellow spread-eagle buttons, clung to my shoulders like a second shirt of Nessus. The vanity of wearing a uniform, that may have once been felt, was long ago thread-bare as the coat itself; and yet I was not wanting in friends, who fancied that it might still exist! How little understood they the real state of the case, and how much did they misconstrue my involuntary motives!

It was just to escape from such unpleasant associations, that I held on to my scrip. Most of my brother-officers had sold theirs for a song, and spent the proceeds upon a supper. In relation to mine, I had other views than parting with it to the greedy speculators. It promised me that very wilderness-home, I was in search of; and, having no prospect of procuring a "fair spirit for my minister," I determined to locate without one.

I was at that time staying in Tennessee—the guest of a campaigning comrade and still older friend. A visit to the land-office of Nashville ended in my selection of Section No. 9, Township—, as my future plantation. It was represented to me as a fertile spot—situated in the Western Reserve—near the banks of the beautiful Obion, and not far above the confluence of this river with the Mississippi. The official believed there had been some improvement made upon the land by a squatter; but whether the squatter still lived upon it, he could not tell. "At all events, the fellow would be too poor to exercise the pre-emption right, and of course must move off." So spoke the land-agent. This would answer admirably. Although my Texan experience had constituted me a tolerable woodsman, it had not made me a woodcutter; and the clearing of the squatter, however small it might be, would serve as a beginning. I congratulated myself on my good luck; and, without further parley, parted with my scrip—receiving in return the necessary documents, that constituted me the legal owner and lord of the soil of Section 9. The only additional information the agent could afford me was: that my new purchase was all heavily timbered, with the exception before referred to; that the township in which it was situated was called Swampville; and that the section itself was known as Holt's Clearing—from the name, it was supposed, of the squatter who had made the improvement.

With this intelligence in my head, and the title-deeds in my pocket, I took leave of the friendly official, who at parting politely wished me a pleasant time of it on my new plantation.

CHAPTER II.

A CLASSIC LAND.

BETWEEN Nashville and Swampville extends a distance of more than a hundred miles—just three days' travel on horseback. For the first ten miles—to Harpeth River—I found an excellent road, graded and macadamized, running most of the way between fenced plantations. My next point was Paris, and forty miles further on I arrived in Dresden.

Beyond Dresden my road could no longer be termed a road. It was a mere trace, or lane, cut out in the forest—with here and there a tree blazed to indicate the direction. As I neared the point of my destination I became naturally curious to learn something about it—that is, about Swampville—since it was evident that this was to be the *point d'appui* of my future efforts at colonization—my depot and port entry. I should have inquired had I found any one to inquire from, but for ten miles along the road I encountered not a human creature. Then only a dinky, with an ox-cart loaded with wood; but despairing of information from such a source, I declined detaining him. The only intelligence I was able to draw from the negro was that "a city o' Swampville, mass'r, he lay 'bout ten mile furrer down da crick." The "ten mile down da crick" proved to be long ones; but throughout the

whole distance I saw not a creature until I had arrived within a mile or so of the settlement.

I had been already apprised that Swampville was a new place. Its fame had not yet reached the eastern world; and even in Nashville was it unknown, except perhaps to the Land Office. It was only after entering the Reserve that I became fully assured of its existence; and there it was known as a settlement rather than a city. For all that, Swampville proved to be not so contemptible a place; and the reason I had encountered so little traffic while approaching it was that I had been coming in the wrong direction—in other words, I had been approaching it from behind.

Swampville was in reality a riverine town. To it the east was a back country, and its front face was to the west. In that direction lay its world, and the ways that opened to it. Log shanties began to line the road—standing thicker as I advanced; while at intervals appeared a frame house of more pretentious architecture. In front of one of these, the largest of the collection—there stood a tall post, or rather a tree with its top cut off, and divested of its lower branches. On the head of this was a martin-box, and underneath the dwelling of the birds a broad framed board on which was legible the word hotel. A portrait of Jackson, done in continental uniform, embellished the face of the board. The sign seemed little appropriate, for in the harsh features of Old Hickory there was but slight promise of hospitality. There was no use going further. The Jackson Hotel was evidently the "head inn" of the place; and without pause or parley I dismounted at its door.

I was too well used to western habits to wait either for welcome or assistance—too careful of my Arab to trust him to hands unskilled—and I did the unsaddling for myself. A half-naked negro gave me some slight help in the grooming process—all the while exhibiting his ivory and the whites of his eyes in an expression of ill-concealed astonishment, produced apparently by the presence of my uniform coat—to the darky, no doubt, an uncommon apparition.

CHAPTER III.

THE JACKSON HOTEL.

I FOUND that I had arrived in the very nick of time, for just as I returned from the stable and was entering the veranda of the hotel I heard the bell calling its guests to supper. There was no ado made about me; neither landlord or waiter met me with a word; and following the stream of boarders or travelers who had arrived before me, I took my seat at the common *table-d'hôte*.

In glancing around the table, I saw not one face that I had ever seen before. There was one, however, that soon attracted my attention, and fixed it. It was not a lady's face, as you may be imagining.

Venus was certainly not visible at the Swampville *table-d'hôte*, for the presiding divinity was a perfect Hecate; and her attendant damsels could have found no place in the train of the Cytherean goddess. No—the face that interested me was neither that of a female, nor in any way feminine. It was the face of a man; and that in the most emphatic sense of the word. He was a young man—apparently about four or five and twenty—and costumed as a backwoods hunter; that is, he wore a buckskin hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins—with bullet-pouch and powder-horn suspended over his shoulder, and hunting-knife sheathed in his belt. The coonskin cap, hanging against the adjacent wall, was his head-dress—I had seen him place it there, before taking his seat at the supper-table. With the personal appearance of this young man the eye was at once satisfied. A figure of correct contour, features of noble outline, a face expressive of fine mental qualities—were the more salient characteristics that struck me at the first glance. Regarding the portrait more particularly, other details became manifest—round hazel eyes, with well-developed lashes; brows finely arched; a magnificent shock of nut-brown curling hair; a small, well-formed mouth, with white, regular teeth—all contributed to the creation of what might be termed a type of manly beauty. This beauty appeared in a somewhat neglected garb. Art might have improved it; but it was evident that none had been employed, or even thought of. It was a clear case of "beauty unadorned;" and the possessor of it appeared altogether unconscious of its existence.

The young man appeared to be rather friendless, than unknown. I could perceive that almost all of the company were acquainted with him; but that most of them—especially the gentlemen in broadcloth—affected an air of superiority over him. No one talked much to him, for his reserved manner did not invite conversation; but when one of these did address a few words to him, it was in the style usually adopted by the well-to-do citizen, holding converse with his less affluent neighbor. The young fellow was evidently not one to be sneered at or insulted; but, for all that, I could perceive that the broadcloth gentry did not quite regard him as an equal. Perhaps this may be explained by the hypothesis that he was poor; and, indeed, it did not require much penetration to perceive that such was the reality. The hunting-shirt, though once a handsome one, was no longer new. On the contrary, it was considerably "scuffed;" and the green baize wrappers upon his limbs were faded to a greenish brown. Other points proclaimed a light purse—perhaps far lighter than the heart of him who carried it—if I was to judge by the expression of his countenance.

Notwithstanding all this, the young hunter was evidently an object of interest—whether friendly or hostile—and might have been the cynosure of the supper-table, but for my undress frock and spread-eagle buttons. These, however, claimed some share of the curiosity of Swampville; and I was conscious of being the object of a portion of its surveillance. I knew not what ideas they could have had about me, and cared as little; but, judging from the looks of the men—the broadcloth gentlemen in particular—I was impressed with a suspicion that I was neither admired nor welcome. In the eyes of your "sovereign citizen" the mere military man is not the hero that he is elsewhere, and he must show something more than a uniform coat to recommend himself to their suffrages. I was conceited enough to imagine that Miss Alvina and her *vis-a-vis*, Miss Carline, did not look altogether unfriendly; but the handsome face and magnificent curls of the young hunter

were beside me, and it was no use taking the field against such a rival. I was not jealous of him, however, nor he of me. On the contrary, of all the men present, he appeared most inclined to be courteous to me, as was evinced by his once or twice pushing within my reach those delicate dishes, distributed at very long distances over the table. I felt an incipient friendship for this young man, which he appeared to reciprocate. He saw that I was a stranger, and notwithstanding the pretentious fashion of my dress, perhaps he noticed my well-worn coat, and conjectured that I might be as poor and friendless as himself. If it was to this conjecture I was indebted for his sympathies, his instincts were not far astray.

CHAPTER IV.

COLONEL KIPP.

AS soon as I had swallowed supper I hastened to place myself *en rapport* with the landlord of the hostelry, whose name I had ascertained to be Kipp, or Colonel Kipp, as his guests called him. Though I had no intention of proceeding further that night I was desirous of obtaining some information about the whereabouts of my new estate, with such other facts in relation to it as might be collected in Swampville. The landlord would be the most likely person to give me the desired intelligence.

When I first set eyes upon the colonel he was in the center of a circle of tooth-pickers, who had just issued from the supper-room. These were falling off one by one, and, noticing their defection, I waited for an opportunity to speak to the colonel alone. This after a short time offered itself.

The dignified gentleman took not the slightest notice of me as I approached, nor until I had got so near as to leave no doubt upon his mind that a conversation was intended. Then, edging slightly round and drawing in the boots, he made a half-face toward me—still, however, keeping fast to his chair.

"The army, sir, I prezoom?" interrogatively began Mr. Kipp.

"No," answered I, imitating his laconism of speech.

"No!"

"I have been in the service. I have just left it."

"Oh—ah! From Mexico, then, I prezoom?"

"Yes."

"Business in Swampville?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Kipp—"

"I am usooally called kurnel here," interrupted the backwoods *militario*, with a bland smile, as if half deprecating the title and that it was forced upon him.

"Of course," continued he, "you, sir, bein' a stranger—"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Kipp; I am a stranger to your city, and of course—"

"Don't signify a dump, sir," interrupted he, rather good-humoredly, in return for the show of deference I had made, as also, perhaps, for my politeness in having styled Swampville a city. "Business in Swampville, you say?"

"Yes," I replied; and, seeing it upon his lips to inquire the nature of my business—which I did not wish to make known just then—I forestalled him by the question:

"Do you chance to know such a place as Holt's Clearing?"

"Chance to know such a place as Holt's Clearin'?"

"Yes, Holt's Clearing."

"Wal, there air sech a place."

"Is it distant?"

"If you mean Hick Holt's Clearin', it's a leetle better'n six miles from here. He squats on Mud Crick."

"There's a squatter upon it, then?"

"On Holt's Clearin'? Wal, I shed rayther say there air a squatter on't, an' no mistake."

"His name is Holt, is it not?"

"That same individooal."

"Do you think I could procure a guide in Swampville—some one who could show me the way to Holt's Clearing?"

"Do I think so? Possible you might. D'ye see that ar' case in the coon-cap?" The speaker looked, rather than pointed, to the young fellow of the buckskin-shirt; who, outside the veranda, was now standing by the side of a very sorry-looking steed.

I replied in the affirmative.

"Wal, I reckon he kin show you the way to Holt's Clearin'. He's another o' them Mud Crick squatters. He's just catchin' up his critter to go that way."

I was about turning away to speak to the young man, when I was recalled by an exclamation from the landlord:

"I guess," said he, in a half-bantering way, "you hain't told me your business yet?"

"No," I answered deferentially, "I have not."

"What on airth's takin' you to Holt's Clearin'?"

"That, Mr. Kipp—I beg pardon—Colonel Kipp—is a private matter."

"Private and particular, eh?"

"Very."

"Oh, then, I guess, you'd better keep it to your self."

"That is precisely my intention," I rejoined, turning on my heel, and stepping out of the veranda.

The young hunter was just buckling the girth of his saddle. As I approached him, I saw that he was smiling. He had overheard the concluding part of the conversation; and looked as if pleased at the way in which I had bantered the colonel: who, as I afterward learned from him, was the grand swaggerer of Swampville. A word was sufficient. He at once acceded to my request, frankly, if not in the most elegant phraseology.

"I'll be pleased to show ye the way to Holt's Clearin'. My own road goes jest that way, till within a squall's jump o't."

"Thank you: I shall not keep you waiting."

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE FOREST.

AS we passed up the street, I was conscious of being the subject of Swampville speculation. Staring faces at the windows, and gaping groups around the doors, proved by their looks and gestures, that I was regarded as a rare spectacle. It could scarcely be my companion who was the object of this universal curiosity. A buckskin hunting-shirt was an everyday sight in Swampville—not so a well-mounted military man, armed, uniformed, and equipped. No doubt, my splendid Arab, *caracoling*

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as if he had not been out of the stable for a week, came in for a large share of the admiration.

We were soon beyond its reach. Five minutes sufficed to carry us out of sight of the Swampvillians: for, in that short space of time, we had cleared the suburbs of the city, and were riding under the shadows of an unbroken forest. Its cold gloom gave instantaneous relief—shading us at one and the same time from the fiery sun, and the glances of vulgar observation through which we had run the gantlet. I at least enjoyed the change; and for some minutes we rode silently on, my guide keeping in advance of me.

A little further on, the path began to ascend. We had passed out of the bottom-lands, and were crossing a ridge, which forms the divide between Mud Creek and the Obion River. The soil was now a dry gravel, with less signs of fertility, and covered with a pine forest. The trees were of slender growth; and at intervals their trunks stood far apart, giving us an opportunity to ride side by side. This was exactly what I wanted; as I was longing for a conversation with my new acquaintance.

Up to this time, he had observed a profound silence; but for all that, I fancied he was not disinclined to a little *causerie*. His reserve seemed to spring from a sense of modest delicacy—as if he did not desire to take the initiative. I relieved him from this embarrassment, by opening the dialogue:

"What sort of a gentleman is this Mr. Holt?"

"Gentleman!"

"Yes—what sort of person is he?"

"Oh, what sort o' person? Well, stranger, he's what we, in these parts, call a rough customer."

"Indeed?"

"Rayther, I shed say."

"Is he what you call a poor man?"

"All that, I reckon. He hain't got nothin', as I knows on, 'ceptin' his old critter o' a hoss, an' his cl'arin' o' a couple o' acres or thereabouts; besides, he only squats upon that."

"He's only a squatter, then?"

"That's all, stranger; tho' I reckon he considers the cl'arin' as much his own as I do my bit o' ground that's been bought an' paid for."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; I shedn't like to be the party that would buy it over his head."

The speaker accompanied these words with a significant glance, which seemed to say, "I wonder if that's his business here."

"Has he any family?"

"Thar's one—a young critter of a girl."

"That all?" I asked, seeing that my companion hesitated, as if he had something more to say, but was backward about declaring it.

"No, stranger; thar war another girl—older than this 'un."

"And she?"

"She—she's gone away."

"Married, I suppose?"

"That's what nobody 'bout here can tell, nor whar' she's gone, neyther."

The tone in which the young fellow spoke had suddenly altered from gay to grave; and, by a glimpse of the moonlight, I could perceive that his countenance was shadowed and somber. I could have but little doubt as to the cause of this transformation. It was to be found in the subject of our conversation—the absent daughter of the squatter. From motives of delicacy I refrained from pushing my inquiries further; but, indeed, I should have been otherwise prevented from doing so; for, just at that moment, the road once more narrowed, and we were forced apart. By the eager urging of his horse into the dark path, I could perceive that the hunter was desirous of terminating a dialogue—to him, in all probability, suggestive of bitter memories.

For another half-hour we rode on in silence—my companion apparently buried in a reverie of thought—myself speculating on the chances of an unpleasant encounter; which, from the hints I had just had was now rather certain than probable. Instead of a welcome from the squatter, and a bed in the corner of his cabin, I had before my mind the prospect of a wordy war; and, perhaps afterward, of spending my night in the woods. Once or twice, I was on the point of proclaiming my errand, and asking the young hunter for advice as to how I should act; but as I had not yet ascertained whether he was friend or foe of my future hypothetical antagonist, I thought it more prudent to keep my secret to myself.

His voice again fell upon my ear—this time in a more cheerful tone. It was simply to say that I might shortly expect a better road—we were approaching a glade; "beyont that the trace war wider an' we might ride thegither again."

We were just entering the glade as he finished speaking—an opening in the woods of limited extent. The contrast between it and the dark forest path we had traversed was striking—as the change itself was pleasant. It was like emerging suddenly from darkness into daylight; for the full moon, now soaring high above the spray of the forest, filled the glade with the ample effulgence of her light. The dew-besprinkled flowers were sparkling like gems; and, even though it was night, their exquisite aroma had reached us afar off in the forest. There was not a breath of air stirring; and the unruffled leaves presented the sheen of shining metal. Under the clear moonlight, I could distinguish the varied hues of the frondage—that of the red maple from the scarlet sumacs and sassafras laurels; and these again, from the dark green of the Carolina bay-trees, and the silvery foliage of the *Magnolia glauca*.

Even before entering the glade, this magnificent panorama had burst upon my sight—from a little embayment that formed the *debourchure* of the path—and I had drawn bridle, in order for a moment to enjoy its contemplation. The young hunter was still the length of his horse in advance of me; and I was about requesting him to pull up; but before I could give utterance to the words, I saw him make halt of himself. This, however was done in so awkward and hurried a manner, that I at once turned from gazing upon the scene and fixed my eyes upon my companion. As if by an involuntary effort, he had drawn his horse almost upon his haunches: and was now stiffly seated in the saddle, with blanched cheeks and eyes sparkling in their sockets—as if some object of terror was before him. I did not ask for an explanation. I knew that the object that so strangely affected him must be visible—though not from the point where I had halted.

A touch of the spur brought my horse alongside his, and gave me a view of the whole surface of the glade. I looked in the direction indicated by the attitude of the hunter; for—apparently paralyzed by some terrible surprise—he had neither pointed nor spoken.

A little to the right of the path, I beheld a white object lying along the ground—a dead tree, whose barkless trunk and smooth naked branches gleamed under the moonlight with the whiteness of a blanched skeleton. In front of this, and a pace or two from it, was a dark form, upright and human-like. Favored by the clear light of the moon, I had no difficulty in distinguishing the form to be that of a woman.

CHAPTER VI. SU-WA-NEE.

BEYOND doubt, the dark form was that of a woman—a young one too, as evinced by her erect bearing, and a light agile movement, made at the moment of our first beholding her. Her attire was odd. It consisted of a brownish-colored tunic—apparently of doeskin leather—reaching from the neck to the knees; underneath which appeared leggings of like material, ending in moccasins that covered the feet. The arms, neck, and head were entirely bare; and the color of the skin, as seen in the moonlight, differed from that of the outer garments only in being a shade or two darker! The woman, therefore, was not white, but an Indian; as was made further manifest by the sparkling of beads and bangles around her neck, rings in her ears, and metal circlets upon her arms—all reflecting the light of the moon in copious coruscations.

As I brought my horse to a halt, I perceived that the figure was advancing toward us, and with rapid step.

On arriving within six paces of the heads of our horses, the Indian paused, as if hesitating to advance. Up to this time she had not spoken a word. Neither had my companion—beyond a phrase or two that had involuntarily escaped him, on first discovering her presence in the glade.

"She here? an' at this time o' night!" I had heard him mutter to himself; but nothing more, until the girl had stopped, as described. Then, in a low voice, and with a slightly trembling accent, he pronounced interrogatively, the words:

"Su-wa-nee?"

It was the name of the Indian maiden; but there was no reply.

"Su-wa-nee!" repeated he, in a louder tone, "is it you?"

The answer was also given interrogatively:

"Has the White Eagle lost his eyes, by gazing too long on the pale faced fair ones of Swampville? There is light in the sky, and the face of Su-wa-nee is turned to it. Let him look on it; it is not lovely like that of the half-blood, but the White Eagle will never see that face again."

This declaration had a visible effect on the young hunter; the shade of sadness deepened upon his features; and I could hear a sigh, with difficulty suppressed—while, at the same time, he appeared desirous of terminating the interview.

"It's late, girl," rejoined he, after a pause; "what for are ye here?"

"Su-wa-nee is here for a purpose. For hours she has been waiting to see the White Eagle. The soft hands of the pale-faced maidens have held him long."

"Waitin' to see me! What do you want wi' me?"

"Let the White Eagle send the stranger aside. Su-wa-nee must speak to him alone."

"Thar's no need o' that; it's a friend that's wi' me."

"Would the White Eagle have his secrets known? There are some he may not wish even a friend to hear. Su-wa-nee can tell him one that will crimson his cheeks like the flowers of the red maple."

"I have no saycrets, girl—none as I'm afraid o' bein' heered by anybody."

"What of the half-blood?"

"I don't care to hear o' her."

"The White Eagle speaks falsely! He does care to hear. He longs to know what has become of his lost Marian. Su-wa-nee can tell him."

The last words produced an instantaneous change in the bearing of the young hunter. Instead of the repelling attitude, he had hitherto observed toward the Indian girl, I saw him bend eagerly forward—as if desirous of hearing what she had to say. Seeing that she had drawn his attention, the Indian again pointed to me, and inquired:

"Is the pale-faced stranger to know the love-secrets of the White Eagle?"

I saw that my companion no longer desired me to be a listener. Without waiting for his reply, I drew my horse's head in the opposite direction, and was riding away. In the turning, I came face to face with him; and by the moonlight shining full over his countenance, I fancied I could detect some traces of mistrust still lingering upon it. My fancy was not at fault; for, on brushing close past him, he leaned over toward me, and, in an earnest manner, muttered:

"Please, stranger! don't go fur—thar's danger in this girl. She's been arter me before."

I nodded assent to his request; and, turning back into the little bay, that formed the *embouchure* of the path, I pulled up under the shadow of the trees.

At this point I was not ten paces from the hunter, and could see him; but a little clump of white magnolias prevented me from seeing the girl—at the same time that it hid both myself and horse from her sight. The chirrup of the cicadas alone hindered me from hearing all of what was said; but many words reached my ear, and with sufficient distinctness, to give me a clew to the subject of the promised revelation. Delicacy would have prompted me to retire a little further off; but the singular caution I had received from my companion, prevented me from obeying its impulse.

I could make out that a certain Marian was the subject of the conversation; and then more distinctively, that it was Marian Holt. Just as I expected, the daughter of my squatter; that other and older one, of whom mention had been already made. This part of the revelation was easily understood; since I was already better than half prepared for it. Equally easy of comprehension was the fact that this Marian was the sweetheart of my traveling companion—*had been*, I should rather say; for, from

what followed, I could gather that she was no longer in the neighborhood; that some months before she had left it, or been carried away—spirited off in some mysterious manner, leaving no traces of the why or whither she had gone. Nearly all this I had conjectured before; since the young hunter had half revealed it to me by his manner, if not by words. Now, however, a point or two was added to my previous information relating to the fair Marian. She was married. Married—and to some odd sort of man, of whom the Indian appeared to speak slightly. His name I could make out to be Steevens, or Steebens, or something of the sort—not very intelligible by the Indian's mode of pronouncing it—and, furthermore, that he had been a schoolmaster in Swampville.

During the progress of the dialogue, I had my eye fixed on the young hunter. I could perceive that the announcement of the marriage was quite new to him; and its effect was as that of a sudden blow. Of course, equally unknown to him had been the name of the husband; though from the exclamatory phrase that followed, he had no doubt had his conjectures.

"Oh, God!" he exclaimed, "I thort so—the very man to a-done it. Lord ha' mercy on her!" All this was uttered with a voice hoarse with emotion.

"Tell me!" continued he, "whar are they gone? Ye say ye know!"

The shrill screech of a tree-cricket, breaking forth at that moment, hindered me from hearing the reply. The more emphatic words only reached me, and these appeared to be "Utah" and "Great Salt Lake." They were enough to fix the whereabouts of Marian Holt and her husband.

"One question more!" said the rejected lover, hesitatingly, as if afraid to ask it. "Can ye tell me—whether—she went willin', or whether—thar wa'n't some force used?—by her father, or some 'un else? Can ye tell me that, girl?"

I listened eagerly for the response. Its importance can be easily understood by one who has sued in vain—one who has wooed without winning. The silence of the cicada favored me; but a long interval passed, and there came not a word from the lips of the Indian.

"Answer me, Su-wa-nee!" repeated the young man in a more appealing tone. "Tell me that, and I promise."

"Will the White Eagle promise to forget his lost love? Will he promise?"

"No, Su-wa-nee; I cannot promise that: I can niver forget her."

"The heart can hate vithout forgetting."

"Hate her? hate Marian? No, no!"

"Not if she be false?"

"How do I know that she war false? You haven't told me whether she went willin' or ag'in' her consent."

"The White Eagle shall know then. His gentle doe went willingly to the covert of the wolf—willingly, I repeat. Su-wa-nee can give proof of her words."

This was the most terrible stroke of all. I could see the hunter shrink in his saddle, a death-like pallor overspreading his cheeks, while his eyes presented the glassy aspect of despair.

"Now," continued the Indian, as if taking advantage of the blow she had struck, "will the White Eagle promise to sigh no more after his false mistress?—will he promise to love one that can be true?"

There was an earnestness in the tone in which these interrogatories were uttered—an appealing earnestness—evidently prompted by a burning head-long passion.

It was now the turn of her who uttered them to wait with anxiety for a response. It came at length—perhaps to the laceration of that proud heart; for it was a negative to its dearest desire.

"No—no!" exclaimed the hunter confusedly.

"Impossible eyther to hate or forget her. She may 'a' been false, an' no doubt are so; but it's too late for me: I can niver love ag'in'."

A half-suppressed scream followed this declaration, succeeded by some words that appeared to be uttered in a tone of menace or reproach. But the words were in the Chicasaw tongue, and I could not comprehend their import.

Almost at the same instant I saw the young hunter hurriedly draw back his horse as if to get out of the way. I fancied that the crisis had arrived, when my presence might be required.

Under this belief I touched my steed with the spur, and trotted out into the open ground. To my astonishment I perceived that the hunter was alone. Su-wa-nee had disappeared from the glade.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING A CLEAN BREAST OF IT.

"WHERE is she—gone?" I mechanically asked, in a tone that must have betrayed my surprise.

"Yes, gone—gone, an' wi' a Mormon!"

"A Mormon?"

"Ay, stranger, a Mormon—a man wi' twenty wives! God forgi' her! I'd rather heerd o' her death."

"Was there a man with her? I saw no one."

"Oh, stranger, excuse my talk—you're thinkin' o' that 'ere Injun girl. 'Tain't her I'm speakin' about."

"Who then?"

The young hunter hesitated. He was not aware that I was already in possession of his secret; but he knew that I had been witness of his emotions, and to declare the name would be to reveal the most sacred thought of his heart.

Only for a moment did he appear to reflect, and then, as if relieved from his embarrassment by some sudden determination, he replied:

"Stranger, I don't see why I shedn't tell ye all about this bisness. I don't know the reezun, but you've made me feel a kind o' confidence in you. I know it's a silly sort o' thing to fall in love wi' a handsum girl; but if ye'd only seen her!"

"I have no doubt, from what you say, she was a beautiful creature"—this was scarcely my thoughts at the moment—"and as for falling in love with a pretty girl, none of us are exempt from that little weakness. The proud Roman conqueror yielded to the seductions of the brown-skinned Egyptian queen; and even Hercules himself was conquered by a woman's charms. There is no particular

silliness in that. It is but the common destiny of man."

"Well, stranger, it's been myen; an' I've hed reezun to be sorry for it. But it's no use tryin' to shet up the stable arter the hoss's been stole out o't. She are gone now, an' that's the end o' it. I reckon I'll niver set eyes on her ag'in."

The sigh that accompanied this last observation, with the melancholy tone in which it was uttered, told me that I was talking to a man who had truly loved.

"But you have not yet told me who this sweet-heart was. You say it is not the Indian damsel you've just parted with?"

"No, stranger, nothin' o' the kind: though there are some Injun in her too. 'Twar o' her the girl spoke when ye heard her talk o' a half-blood. She ain't just that—she's more white than Injun; her mother only war a half-blood—o' the Chicasaw nation, that used to belong in these parts."

"Her name?"

"It war Marian Holt. It are now Stebbins, I s'pose, since I've jest heard she's married to a fellow o' that name."

"She has certainly not improved her name."

"She are the daughter o' Holt, the squatter—the same whar you say you're a-goin'. Thar's another, as I told ye; but she's a younger 'un. Her name's Lillian."

"A pretty name. The older sister was very beautiful, you say?"

"I niver set eyes on the like o' her."

"Does the younger one resemble her?"

"Ain't a bit like her—different as a squ' from a moon."

"She's not beautiful, then?"

"Well, that depends upon people's ways o' thinkin'. Most people as know 'em liked Lillian the best, an' thort her the handsomest o' the two. That wa'n't my notion. Besides, Lilly's only a young crittur—not out o' her teens yet."

"But you have not yet told me the full particulars of your affair with Marian? You say she has gone away from the neighborhood?"

"You shall hear it all, stranger. I reckon thar can be no harm in tellin' it to you; an' if you've a mind to listen, I'll make a clean breast o' the whole business."

The hunter proceeded with his revelation, which was as follows:

"'Twar a mornin'—jest five months ago—she had promised to meet me here, an' I war seated on yonder log waitin' for her. Jest then some Injuns war comin' through the glee. That girl ye saw war one o' 'em. She had a nice bullet-pouch to sell, an' I bought it. The girl would insist on puttin' it on; an' while she war doin' so, I war fool enough to gi'e her a kiss. Some devil hed put it in my head. Jest at that minnit, who shed come right into the glee but Marian herself! I meant nothin' by kissin' the Injun; but I s'pose Marian thort I did; she'd already talked to me 'bout this very girl, an' I believe war a leetle bit jealous o' her—for the Injun ain't to say ill-lookin'. I wanted to 'pologize to Marian; but she wouldn't listen to a word, an' went off in a way I niver see'd her in before. 'Twar the last time I ever set eyes on her."

"Indeed?"

"Ay, stranger, an' it's only this minnit, an' from that same Injun girl, that I've heard she's married, an' gone off to the Mormons. The Injuns had it from some o' her people, that see'd Marian a-crossin' the pararies."

"This Indian damsel—Su-wa-nee, I think you named her—what of her?"

"Ah, stranger, that's another of the consequences o' doin' what ain't right. Since the day I gi'n her that kiss, she'd niver let me alone, but used to bother me every time I met her in the woods, an' would 'a' come arter me to my own cabin, if it hadn't been for the dogs, that w'd 'a' an Injun to pieces. She war afeerd o' them, but not o' me, no matter how I threated her. I war so angry—her for what had happened—though arter all 'twas more my fault than hern—but I war so vexed w' her about the ill-luck, that I used to keep out o' her way as well as I could, an' didn't speak to her for a long time. She got riled 'bout that, an' threated revenge; an' one night, as I war comin' from Swampville, 'bout this time—only 'twar as dark as a pot o' pitch—I war jest ridin' out into this very glade, when all o' a suddint my ole hoss gi'n a jump forrard, an' I feeled somethin' prick me from behind. 'Twar the stab o' some sort o' a knife, that cut me a leetle above the hip, an' made me bleed like a buck. I know'd who did it; tho' not that night—for it war so dark among the bushes, I couldn't see a stein. But I kim back in the mornin', an' see'd tracks. They war the tracks o' a moccasin. I know'd 'em to be Su-wa-nee's tracks. I told her so the next time I see'd her; an' she 'peared pleased 'bout my not havin' her ta'en up. She said it war generous of the White Eagle—that's the name her people gi'es me—for thar's a gang o' them still livin' down the crik. She gi'n me a sort o' promise she wouldn't trouble me ag'in; but I warn't sure o' her. That's the reezun I didn't want ye to go fur away."

"I think it would be prudent in you to keep well on your guard. This red-skin appears to be rather an unreflecting damsel; and, from what you have told me, a dangerous one. She certainly has a strange way of showing her affection; but it must be confessed, you gave her some provocation; and as the poet says, 'Hell knows no fury like a woman scorned.'"

"That's true, stranger!"

"Her conduct, however, has been too violent to admit of justification. You appear to have been unfortunate in your sweethearts—with each in an opposite sense. One loves you too much, and the other apparently not enough! But how is it you did not see her again—Marian I mean?"

"Well, you understand, I wa'n't on the best of terms w' old Hick Holt, an' couldn't go to his cl'arin'. Besides after what had happened, I didn't like to go near Marian anyhow—leastways for a while. I thort it would blow over—s soon's she'd find out that I war only jokin' w' the Injun. 'Twar nigh two weeks afore I heard anything o' her; then I l'arned that she war gone away. Nobody could tell why or whar, for nobody knew, 'ceptin' Hick Holt hisself; an' he ain't the sort o' man to tell saycrets. Lord o' mercy! I know now; an' it's worse than I expected. I'd sooner heard she war dead."

A deep-drawn sigh, from the very bottom of his soul, admonished me that the speaker had finished his painful recital.

I had no desire to prolong the conversation. I saw that silence would be more agreeable to my companion; and, as if by a mutual and tacit impulse, we turned our horses' heads to the path, and proceeded onward across the glade.

As we were about entering the timber on the other side, my guide reined up his horse; and sat for a moment gazing upon a particular spot—as if something there had attracted his attention.

What? There was no visible object—at least, none that was remarkable—on the ground, or elsewhere!

Another sigh, with the speech that followed, explained the singularity of his behavior.

"Thar!" said he, pointing to the entrance of the forest-path—"thar's the place whar I last looked on Marian!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRECIPITANT IN PROSPECT.

FOR half a mile beyond the glade, the trace continued wide enough to admit of our riding abreast; but, notwithstanding this advantage, no word passed between us. My guide had relapsed into his attitude of melancholy—deepened, no doubt, by the intelligence he had just received—and sat loosely in his saddle, his head drooping forward over his breast.

I was on the eve of declaring the object of my errand, and soliciting his counsel thereon, when I saw him suddenly rein in, and turn toward me. In the former movement, I imitated his example.

"The road forks here," said he. "The path on the left goes straight down to Holt's Cl'arin'—the other's the way to my bit o' a shanty."

"I shall have to thank you for the very kind service you have rendered me, and say 'Good night.'"

"No, not yet. I ain't a-goin' to leave ye, till I've put you 'ithin sight o' Holt's cabin, tho' I can't go wi' ye to the house."

"I cannot think of your coming out of your way—especially at this late hour. I'm some little of a tracker myself; and, perhaps, I can make out the path."

"No, stranger! Thar's places whar the trace is a'most blind, and you mout get out o' it. Thar'll be no moon on it. It runs through a thick-timbered bottom, an' thar's an ugly bit o' swamp. As for the lateness, I'm not very reg'lar in my hours; an' thar's a sort o' road up the crik by which I can get home. Twa'n't to bid you good-night that I stopped here."

"What, then?" thought I, endeavoring to conjecture his purpose, while he was pausing in his speech.

"Stranger!" continued he, in an altered tone, "I hope you won't take offense if I ask you a question?"

"Not much fear of that, I fancy. Ask it freely."

"Are ye sure o' a bed at Holt's?"

"Well, upon my word, to say the truth, I am by no means sure of one. It don't signify, however. I have my old cloak and my saddle; and it wouldn't be the first time, by hundreds, I've slept in the open air."

"My reezuns for askin' you air, that if you ain't sure o' one, an' don't mind stretchin' yourself on a b'ar-skin, thar's such a thing in my shanty entirely at your service."

"It is very kind of you. Perhaps I may have occasion to avail myself of your offer. In truth, I am not very confident of meeting with a friendly reception at the hands of your neighbor Holt—much less being asked to partake of his hospitality."

"D'ye say so?"

"Indeed, yes. From what I have heard, I have reason to anticipate rather a cold welcome."

"I'deed? But—"

My companion hesitated in his speech, as if meditating some observation which he felt a delicacy about making.

"I'm a'most ashamed," continued he, at length, "to put another question, that war on the top o' my tongue."

"I shall take pleasure in answering any question you may think proper to ask me."

"I shesn't ask it, if it wa'n't for what you've jest now said; for I heard the same question put to you this night afore, an' I heard your answer to it. But I reckon 'twar the way in which it war asked that offended you; an' on that account your answer war jest as it should 'a' been."

"To what question do you refer?"

"To your business out here w' Hick Holt. I don't want to know it, out o' any curiosity o' my own—that's sart'in, stranger."

"You are welcome to know all about it. Indeed, it was my intention to have told you before we parted; at the same time to ask you for some advice about the matter."

Without further parley, I communicated the object of my visit to Mud Creek, concealing nothing that I deemed necessary for the elucidation of the subject. Without a word of interruption, the young hunter heard my story to the end. From the play of his features, as I revealed the more salient points, I could perceive that my chances of an amicable adjustment of my claim were far from being brilliant.

"Well, do you know," said he, when I had finished speaking, "I had a suspicion that that might be your business? I don't know why I shed 'a' thort so; but maybe 'twar because thar's been some others come here to settle o' late, an' found squatters on thar groun'—jest the same as Holt's on yourn. That's why ye heard me say, a while ago, that I shesn't like to buy over his head."

"And why not?"

I awaited the answer to this question, not without a certain degree of nervous anxiety. I was beginning to comprehend the counsel of my Nashville friend on the ticklish point of pre-emption.

"Why, you see, stranger, as I told you, Hick Holt's a rough customer; an' I reckon he'll be an ugly one to deal w' on a bisness o' that kind."

"Of course, being in possession, he may purchase the land? He has the right of pre-emption?"

"'Tain't for that. He ain't a-goin' to pre-empt, nor buy, neyther; an' for the best o' reezuns. He hain't got a red cent in the world, an' couldn't buy

as much land as would make him a mellyun patch—not he. But," continued the hunter, changing the subject, as well as the tone of his speech, "surely, stranger, you ain't a-goin' on your bisness the night?"

"I've just begun to think that it is rather an odd hour to enter upon an estate. The idea didn't occur to me before."

"Besides," added he, "thar's another reezun. If Hick Holt's what he used to be, he ain't likely to be very nice about this time o' night. I hain't seen much o' him lately; but I reckon he's as fond o' drink as ever he war; an' 'tain't often he goes to his bed 'ithout a skinful. Thar's ten chances ag'in one, o' your findin' him w' brick in his hat."

"That would be awkward."

"Don't think o' goin' to-night," continued the young hunter in a persuasive tone. "Come along w' me; an' you can ride down to Holt's in the mornin'. You'll then find him more reezonable to deal w'. I can't offer you no great show o' entertainment; but thar's a piece o' deer-meat in the house, an' I reckon I can raise a cup o' coffee, an' a pone or two o' bread. As for your horse, the ole corn-crib ain't quite empty yet."

"Thanks—thanks!" said I, grasping the hunter's hand in the warmth of my gratitude. "I accept your invitation."

"This way, then, stranger!"

We struck into a path that led to the right; and, after riding about two miles further, arrived at the solitary home of the hunter—a log-cabin surrounded by a clearing. I soon found he was its sole occupant—as he was its owner—some half-dozen large dogs being the only living creatures that were present to bid us welcome. A rude horse-shed was at hand—a loose box, it might be termed, as it was only intended to accommodate one—and this was placed at the disposal of my Arab. The "critter" of my host had, for that night, to take to the woods, and choose his stall among the trees—but to that sort of treatment he had been well inured. A close-chinked cabin for a lodging; a bear-skin for a bed; cold venison, corn bread, and coffee for supper; with a pipe to follow; all these, garnished with the cheer of a hearty welcome, constitute an entertainment not to be despised by an old campaigner; and such was the treatment I met with, under the hospitable clap-board roof of the young backwoodsman—Frank Wingrove, and next morning I took my way to "Holt's Clearing."

CHAPTER IX.

A BACKWOODS VENUS.

I WAS prepared for a tortuous path: my host had forewarned me of this.

A few years before a tornado had passed through that portion of the forest leveling the trees in a clean track. The old trace, passing down the creek bottom, had run at right angles to the direction of the storm; and of course, the trees had fallen perpendicularly across the path—where they still lay, thick as hurdles set for a donkey-race. Some of them could be stepped over by a horse, and a few might be jumped, but there were others that rose breast high; and a flying-leap over a five-barred gate would have been an easy exploit, compared with clearing one of these monstrous barriers.

Not being in any particular hurry, I took the matter quietly; and wound my way through a labyrinth worthy of being the maze of Fair Rosamond.

I could not help remarking the singular effect which the *herrikin*, as the Tenesseeans call it, had produced. To the right and left, as far as my view could range, extended an opening, like some vast avenue that had been cleared for the passage of giants, and by giants made! On each side appeared the unbroken forest—the trunks standing like columns, with shadowy aisles between; their outward or edge-row trending in a straight line, as if so planted. These showed not a sign that the fierce tornado had passed so near them; though others, whose limbs almost interlocked with theirs, had been mowed down without mercy by the ruthless storm.

I had arrived within fifty yards of the opposite side, and the dark forest was again before my face; but even at that short distance, the eye vainly endeavored to pierce its somber depths. I was congratulating myself, that I had passed the numerous logs that lay across the path, when yet one more appeared between me and the standing trees. It had been one of the tallest victims of the tornado; and now lay transversely to the line of the track, which cut it about midway. On nearing this obstacle, I saw that the trace forked into two—one going around the tops of the decaying branches, while the other took the direction of the roots; which, with the soil still adhering to them, formed a rounded buttress-like wall of full ten feet in diameter. The trunk itself was not over five—that being about the thickness of the tree. It was a matter of choice which of the two paths should be followed; since both appeared to come together again on the opposite side of the tree; but I had made up my mind to take neither. One of my motives, in seeking this forest home, had been a desire to indulge in the exciting exercise of the chase; and the sooner I should bring my horse into practice, the sooner I might take the field with a prospect of success. Log-leaping was new to my Arab; and he might stand in need of a little training to it. The log before me had open ground on both sides; and afforded a very good opportunity for giving him his first lesson. Thus prompted by St. Hubert, I was about spurring forward to the run; when a hoof-stroke falling upon my ear, summoned me to desist from my intention.

The sound, proceeded from the forest before my face; and, peering into its darkness, I could perceive that some one, also on horseback, was coming along the path. This caused me to change my design, or rather to pause until the person should pass. Had I continued in my determination to leap the log, I should, in all likelihood, have dashed my horse at full gallop against that of the approaching traveler; since our courses lay directly head to head.

While waiting till he should ride out of the way, I became aware that I had committed an error—only in regard to the sex of the person who was approaching. It was not a he! On the contrary, something so very different that, as soon as I had succeeded in shading the sun-glare out of my eyes; and obtained a fair view of the equestrian trav-

eler, my indifference was at an end; I beheld one of the loveliest apparitions ever made manifest in female form, or need I scarcely add, in any other. It was a young girl—certainly not over sixteen years of age—but with a contour close verging upon womanhood. Her beauty was of that character which cannot be set forth by a detailed description in words. In true loveliness there is a harmony of the features that will not suffer them to be considered apart; nor does the eye take note of any one, to regard it as unique or characteristic. It is satisfied with the *coup d'œil* of the whole—if I may be permitted the expression. Real beauty needs not to be considered; it is acknowledged at a glance; eye and heart, impressed with it at the same instant, search not to study its details.

And this fair creature was costumed in the simplest manner—almost coarsely clad. A sleeved dress of homespun with a yellowish stripe, loosely worn, and open at the breast. A cotton sun-bonnet was the only covering for her head—her bright amber-colored hair the only shawl upon her shoulders, over which it fell in ample luxuriance. A string of pearls around her neck—false ones I could see—was the sole effort that vanity seemed to have made; for there was no other article of adornment. Even shoes and stockings were wanting; but the most costly *chaussure* could not have added to the elegance of those *mignon* feet, that, daintily protruding below the skirt of her dress, rested along the flank the horse.

More commonplace even than her homespun frock was the steed that carried her—a sorry-looking animal, that resembled the skeleton of a horse with the skin left on! There was no saddle—scarce the semblance of one. A piece of bear-skin, strapped over the back with a rough thong, did service for a saddle; and the little feet hung loosely down without step or stirrup. The girl kept her seat, partly by balancing, but as much by holding on to the high bony withers of the horse, that rose above his shoulders like the hump of a dromedary. The scant mane, wound around her tiny fingers, scarcely covered them; while with the other hand she clasped the black reins of an old dilapidated bridle. The want of saddle and stirrup did not hinder her from poising herself gracefully upon the piece of bear-skin; but hers was a figure that could not be ungraceful in any attitude; and, as the old horse hobbled along, the rude movement all the more palpably displayed the magnificent molding of her body and limbs.

The contrast between horse and rider was ridiculously striking; the former appearing a burlesque on the most beautiful of quadrupeds, while the latter was the very impersonation of the loveliest of biped forms.

CHAPTER X.

A SERIES OF CONTRE-TEMPS.

AT sight of this charming equestrian, all thoughts of leaping the log were driven out of my mind; and I rode quietly forward, with the intention of going round it. It might be that I timed the pace of my horse—mechanically, no doubt—but however that may have been, I arrived at the prostrate tree, just as the young girl reached it from the opposite side. We were thus brought face to face, the log-barrier between us. I would have spoken; but, for the life of me, I could not think of something graceful to say; and to have used the hackneyed phraseology of "Fine morning, miss!" would, in those beautiful blue eyes that glistened under the shadow of the sun-bonnet, have rendered me as commonplace as the remark. I felt certain it would; and therefore said nothing.

Some acknowledgment, however, was necessary; and, lifting the forage-cap from my forehead, I bowed slightly. My salutation was acknowledged by a nod, and, as I fancied, a smile. Either was grace enough for me to expect; but, whether the smile was the offspring of a feeling in my favor, or at my expense, I was unable at the moment to determine. I should have an opportunity of repeating the bow, as we met again in going round the tree. Then I should certainly speak to her; and, as I turned my horse's head to the path, I set about thinking of something to say.

I had taken the path leading to the right, that which passed round the root of the tree. Of the two ways this appeared to be the shorter and the more used. What was my chagrin, when, in glancing over my arm, I perceived that I had made a most grievous mistake; the girl was going in the opposite direction! Yes—she had chosen to ride round the branching tops of the dead-wood—by all the gods, a much wider circuit! Was it accident, or design? It had the appearance of the latter. I fancied so, and fell many degrees in my own estimation. Her choosing what was evidently the round-about direction, argued unwillingness that we should meet again, since the mazy movement we were now performing precluded all chance of a second encounter, except with the great log still between us. Even then we should be no longer *vis-à-vis* as before, but *dos-a-dos*, almost on the instant of our approaching! To insure even this poor privilege, I rode rapidly round the great buttress of roots, that for a moment concealed the fair equestrian from my sight. I did this with the intention of getting forward in time. So rapidly did I pass, and so absorbed was I in the idea of another sweet salutation, that I saw not the fearful creature that lay basking upon the log—on the sunny side of the upheaved mass of earth.

Once on the other side I discovered that I had made a third mistake—equally as provoking as the second—I had arrived too soon! Golden-hair was away up among the tangle of the tree-tops. I could see her bright face gleaming through the branches, now and then hidden by the broad leaves of the bignonia that laced them together. To make me still more miserable, I fancied that she was moving with a studied slowness. I had already reached that point where the path parted from the log. I dared not pause: there was no excuse for it. Not the shadow of one could I think of; and, with a lingering look toward that glittering attraction, I reluctantly headed my horse to the forest. A last glance over my shoulder disclosed no improvement in my situation. She was still behind the trellised leaf-work of the bignonia, where she had stayed perhaps to pluck a flower.

With one circumstance I now reproached myself: why had I been so shy with this forest damsel? The

very way to secure her indifference. Why had I not spoken to her if only in common-place? Even "Good-day" would have promised me a response; and the result could not have been more unfavorable. Why the deuce had I not bidden her "Good-day?" I should have heard her voice—no doubt an additional charm—for I never yet saw a beautiful woman with a harsh voice; and I fear the inverse proposition is equally true. Why passed I without speaking? Perhaps it was my very shyness she was smiling at? "Sdeath! what a simpleton—Ho! what do I hear? A woman's voice—a cry?—of terror? There again!—a scream! the words, "Help! Oh, help!" Turning my horse with a wrench, I urged him back along the path. I was scarcely yet a dozen lengths from the log—for the reflections above detailed were but the thoughts of a moment. Half a dozen bounds of my steed brought me back to the edge of a standing timber—where I pulled up, to ascertain the purport of this singular summons that had reached me.

I made no inquiry—no explanation was needed. The scene explained itself; for at the moment of my emerging from the shadowy path I had a tableau under my eyes expressive as it was terrifying. The girl was upon the other side of the log, and near the point where she should have turned off from it; but instead of advancing I saw that she had come to a halt—her attitude expressing the wildest terror, as if some fearful object was before her. The jade too showed affright by snorting loudly—his head raised high in the air and his long ears pointing forward. The young girl was dragging mechanically on the bridle—as if to head him away from the spot. But this was impossible; another log, overlapping the first, formed an avenue so narrow as to leave not the slightest chance of a horse being able to turn in it. Into this the animal had backed. There was no way of his getting from between the two trunks but by going straight forward or backward. Forward he dared not go, and backward he was moving as fast as the nature of the place would permit. My astonishment was of short duration. Effect and cause came under my eye almost at the same instant. The latter I saw upon the log in hideous form—the form of a cougar!

Slowly advancing along the dead-wood—not by bounds or paces, but with the stealthy tread of a cat—his long red body stretched out to its full extent—the beast more resembled a gigantic caterpillar than a quadruped. I could scarcely detect the movement of his limbs, so closely did the monster crawl; but his great tail, tapering three feet behind him, was seen vibrating from side to side, or at intervals moving with quick jerks—expressive of the enjoyment he was receiving in the contemplation of his prey—for such he deemed the helpless maiden before him.

With a glance I had comprehended the situation; indeed, at the first glance I understood it perfectly. My delay in acting only arose from the necessity of preparing for action; and that did not take long.

My rifle was resting across the pommel of my saddle. It was but the work of a moment to get the piece ready. The pressure of the muzzle against my horse's ear, was a signal well understood; and at once rendered him as immobile as if made of bronze. Many years of practice—during which I had often aimed at higher game—had steeled my nerves and straightened my sight. Both proved sufficiently true for the destruction of the cougar. Quick after the crack, I saw his red body roll back from the log; and, when the smoke thinned off, I could see the animal writhing upon the ground. Why the cougar had fallen to my side, I could not tell: for he was fairly on the ridge of the dead-wood when I fired. Perhaps, on receiving the shot, he had fancied that it came from the only enemy visible to him; and, by an instinct impelling him to escape, had tumbled off in the opposite direction. I perceived that he was not yet dead. He was still wriggling about among the branches; but it was clear that the piece of lead had taken the spring out of him. The bullet had passed through his spine, crashing the column in twain. After playing upon him with my revolving pistol, until I had emptied three or four of its chambers, I had the satisfaction of seeing him give his last spasmodic kick.

What followed, I leave to the imagination of my reader. Suffice it to say, that the incident proved my friend. The ice of indifference was broken; and I was rewarded for my sleight-of-hand prowess by something more than smiles—by words of praise that rung melodiously in my ear—words of gratitude spoken with the free innocent naivete of childhood—revealing, on the part of her who gave utterance to them, a truly grateful heart.

I rode back with my fair *protégée* across the track of fallen timber—I could have gone with her to the end of the world! The tortuous path hindered me from holding much converse with her: only, now and then, was there opportunity for a word. I remember little of what was said—on my side, no doubt, much that was commonplace; but even her observations I can recall but confusedly. The power of love was upon me, alike absorbing both soul and sense—engrossing every thought in the contemplation of the divine creature by my side I cared not to talk—enough for me to look and listen.

I did not think of questioning her as to whence she had come. Even her name was neither asked nor ascertained! Thither she was going was revealed by the accident of conversation. She was on her way to visit some one who lived on the other side of the creek—some friend of her father. Would that I could have claimed to be her father's friend—his relative—his son!

We reached a ford: it was the crossing-place. The house, for which her visit was designed, stood not far off, on the other side; and I must needs leave her. Emboldened by what had passed, I caught hold of that little hand. It was a rare liberty; but I was no longer master of myself. There was no resistance; but I could perceive that the tiny fingers trembled at my touch.

The old horse, with provoking impatience, plunged into the stream; and we were parted.

Lingering upon the bank, I gazed upon her receding form—with my eyes, followed it through the forest aisle; and then, saw it only at intervals—until by a sudden turning in the path, it was taken from my sight.

CHAPTER XI.

SWEET AND BITTER.

SLOWLY and reluctantly, I turned back from the stream, and once more entered amid the wreck of the hurricane. Along the sunny path, the flowers appeared to sparkle with a fresher brilliancy—imbuing the air with sweet odors, wafted from many a perfumed chalice. The birds sung with clearer melody; and the hum of the honey-bee rung through the glades more harmoniously than ever. The coo-coo-co of the doves blending with the love-call of the squirrel, betokened that both were inspired by the tenderest of passions. *Pensando de amor*, as the Spanish phrase finely expresses it; for at that moment, the beautiful words of the southern poet were in my thoughts and upon my lips:

Aunque las fieras
En sus guaridas
Enternecidas
Pensan de amor!

Even the fierce beasts in their forest lairs become gentle under the influence of this all-pervading passion!

I rode on slowly and in silence—my whole absorbed in the contemplation of that fair being, whose image seemed still before my eyes—palpable as if present.

On arriving at the scene of my late adventure, a turn was given to my thoughts. It had been a scene of triumph, and deserved commemoration. The body of the panther lay across the path. His shining skin was a trophy not to be despised; and, dismounting on the spot, with my hunting-knife I secured it. In a few minutes, it was folded up, and strapped over the cantle of my saddle: and, with this odd addition to my equipage, I once more plunged into the forest-path.

For the next mile, the trace led through heavy bottom timber, such as we had traversed, after leaving the settlement of Swampville. The black earth, of alluvial origin, was covered deeply with decayed vegetation; and the track of horses and cattle had converted the path into mud. At intervals, it was intersected by embayments of wet morass—the projecting arms of a great swamp, that appeared to run parallel with the creek. Through these, my horse, unused to such footing, passed with difficulty—often floundering up to his flanks in the mud. Though it was but the hour of noon, it more resembled night, or the late gloaming of twilight—so dark were the shadows under this umbrageous wood. As if to strengthen the illusion, I could hear the cry of the bittern, and the screech of the owl, echoing through the aisles of the forest—sounds elsewhere suggestive of night and darkness. Now and then, light shone upon the path—the light that indicates an opening in the forest; but it was not that of a friendly clearing. Only the break caused by some dismal lagoon, amidst whose dank stagnant waters even the cypress cannot grow—the habitat of black water-snakes and mud-turtles—of cranes, herons, and *Qua* birds. Hundreds of these I saw perched upon the rotting half-submerged trunks—upon the cypress knees that rose like brown obelisks around the edge of the water; or winged their slow flight through the murky gloom, and filling the air with their deafening screams. On both sides of the trace towered gigantic trees, flanked at their bases with huge projections that appeared like the battlements of a fortress. These singular protuberances rose far above the height of my horse—radiating from the trunks on every side, and often causing the path to take a circuitous direction. In the deep gloom, the track would have been difficult to follow, but for an occasional blaze appearing upon the smooth bark of the sycamores.

The scene was by no means suggestive of pleasant reflections—the less so, since I had ascertained, from my host of yesternight, that the greater portion of Section No. 9 was of just such a character; and that there was scarcely a spot upon it fit for a homestead, except the one already occupied! "Such an incumbrance on my estate," reflected I, "is worse than the heaviest mortgage; and I should have been willing at that moment to part with the timber at a very low valuation. But I well knew the value of such a commodity. On the Thames or the Mersey, a mine of wealth—on Mud Creek, it would not have been taken as a gift! My spirits fell as I rode forward—partly influenced by the somber scenes through which I was passing—partly by the natural reaction which ever follows the hour of sweet enjoyment—and partly, no doubt, from some unpleasant presentiments that were once more shaping themselves in my mind.

Up to this time, I had scarcely given thought to my errand, or its object. First the gay hues of the morning, and then the romantic incidents of the hour, had occupied my thoughts, and hindered me from dwelling on future plans or purposes. Now, however, that I was coming close to the clearing of the squatter, I began to feel, that I was also approaching a crisis.

CHAPTER XII.

A RUDE RESPONSE.

AN opening of about two acres in extent, of irregular semi-circular shape, with the creek for its chord, and a worm-fence zig-zagging around its arc—scarcely a clearing; since trees bleached and barkless stand thickly over it: a log shanty, with clapboard roof, in the center of the concavity, flanked on one side by a rude horse shed, on the other, by a corn-crib of split rails; all three—shed, shanty and crib—like the tower of Pisa, threatening to tumble down; near the shanty a wood-pile, with an old ax lying upon the chop-block; by the shed and crib a litter of white stumps and cobs; in front, among the stumps and girdled trees, a thin straggly of withered corn-stalks, shorn of their leafy tops—some standing, some trampled down: such was the picture before my eyes, as, with my horse breast up against the fence, I looked into the clearing of Squatter Holt!

I had ridden quite up to the fence, but could see no gate. A set of bars, however, between two roughly mortised uprights, indicated an entrance to the inclosure. The top bar was out. Not feeling inclined to dismount, I sprung my horse over the others, and then trotted forward in front of the shanty. The door stood wide open. I had hopes

that the sound of my horse's hoof-stroke would have brought some one into it; but no one came. Was there nobody within? I waited for a minute or two, listening for some sign of life in the interior of the cabin. No voice reached me—no sound of any one stirring! Perhaps the cabin was empty! Not untenanted, since I could perceive the signs of occupation in some articles of rude furniture visible inside the doorway. Perhaps the inmates had gone out for a moment and might be in the woods near at hand.

I looked around the clearing and over the fence into the forest beyond. No one to be seen! no one to be heard! Without the cabin, as within, reigned a profound silence. Not a living thing in sight, save the black vultures, a score of which, perched on the dead-woods overhead and fetid as their food, were infecting the air with their carrion odor.

I had no desire to appear rude. I already regretted having leaped my horse over the bars. Even that might be regarded as rather a brusque method of approach to a private dwelling; but I was in hopes it would not be noticed, since there appeared to be no one who had witnessed it. I coughed and made other noises, with like unfruitful result. My demonstrations were either not heard, or, if heard, unheeded.

"Certainly," thought I, "if there be any one in the house, they must not only hear, but see me," for although there was no window, I could perceive that the logs were but poorly chinked, and from within the house the whole clearing must have been in sight. Nay, more: the interior itself was visible from without—at least the greater part of it—and, while making this observation, I fancied I could trace the outlines of a human figure through the interstices of the logs! I became convinced it was a human figure, and furthermore, the figure of a man. It was odd he had not heard me! Was he asleep? No, that could not be, from the attitude in which he was. He appeared to be seated in a chair, but with his body erect and his head held aloft. In such position he could scarcely be asleep. After making this reflection, and feeling a little provoked by the inexplicable somnolency of the owner of the cabin, I determined to try whether my voice might not rouse him.

"Ho, house there!" I shouted, though not loudly; "ho! hollo! any one within?"

Again the figure moved, but stirred not from the seat!

I repeated both my summons and query—this time in still a louder and more commanding tone; and this time I obtained a response.

"Who air you?" came a voice through the interstices of the logs—a voice that more resembled the growl of a bear than the articulation of a human throat. "Who air you?" repeated the voice, while at the same time I could perceive the figure rising from the chair.

I made no answer to the rough query. I saw that my last summons had been sufficient. I could hear the heavy floor-planks cracking under a heavy boot, and knew from this that my questioner was passing toward the door. In another instant he stood in the doorway—his body filling it from side to side—from head to stoop.

A fearful-looking man was before me. A man of gigantic stature, with a beard reaching to the second button of his coat, and above it a face not to be looked upon without a sensation of terror; a countenance expressive of determined courage, but at the same time of ferocity, untempered by any trace of a softer emotion. A shaggy sand-colored beard, slightly grizzled; eyebrows like a *cheval-de-frise* of hogs' bristles; eyes of a greenish-gray, with a broad livid scar across the left cheek, were component parts in producing this expression, while a red cotton kerchief, wound turban-like around the head and pulled low down in front, rendered it more palpable and pronounced. A loose coat of thick green blanket, somewhat faded and worn, added to the colossal appearance of the man, while a red flannel shirt served him for a vest.

His large limbs were inserted in pantaloons of blue Kentucky jeans cloth; but these were scarcely visible, hidden by the skirt of the ample blanket-coat that draped down below the tops of a pair of rough horseskin boots reaching above the knee, and into which the trousers had been tucked.

The face of the man was a singular picture; the colossal stature rendered it more striking; the costume corresponded; and all were in keeping with the rude manner of my reception.

It was idle to ask the question. From the description given me by the young backwoodsman, I knew the man before me to be Hickman Holt the squatter.

CHAPTER XIII. A ROUGH RECEPTION.

For fashion's sake, I was about to utter the usual formula:

"Mr. Holt, I presume?"

But the opportunity was not allowed me. No sooner had the squatter appeared in his doorway than he followed up his uncourteous interrogatory with a series of others, couched in language equally rude.

"What's all this muss about? Durn y'ur stinkin' impudence, who air ye? an' what air ye arter?"

"I wish to see Mr. Holt," I replied, struggling hard to keep my temper.

"Ye wish to see Mister Holt? Thur's no Mister Holt 'bout hyur."

"No?"

"Didn't ye hear me?"

"Do I understand you to say that Hickman Holt does not live here?"

"You understand me to say no sich thing. Ef 't's Hick Holt ye mean, he diz live hyur."

"Hick Holt—yes, that is the name."

"Wall, what o't ef 't is?"

"I wish to see him."

"Lookee hyur, stranger!" and the words were accompanied by a significant look; "ef y'ur the sheriff Hick Holt ain't at home—ye understand me? he ain't at home."

The last phrase was rendered more emphatic by the speaker, as he uttered it, raising the flap of his blanket-coat and exhibiting a huge bowie-knife stuck through the waistband of his trousers. I understood the hint perfectly.

"I am not the sheriff," I answered in an assuring tone.

I was in hopes of gaining favor by the declaration, for I had already fancied that my bizarre reception might be owing to some error of this kind.

"I am not the sheriff," I repeated impressively.

"An' who air ye, anyhow—wi' y'ur glitterin' buttons, an' y'ur waist draw'd in like a skewered skunk?"

This was intolerable: but remembering the advice I had received over night, I strove hard to keep down my rising choler.

"My name—" said I.

"I don't care a dog-gone for y'ur name: tell me y'ur bizness—that's what I want know."

"I have already told you my business: I wish to see Mr. Holt—Hick Holt if you like."

"To see Hick Holt? Wal, ef that's all y'ur bizness, you've see'd him; an' now ye kin go."

This was rather a literal interpretation of my demand; but, without permitting myself to be nonplused by it or paying any heed to the abrupt words of dismissal, I replied, half-interrogatively:

"You, then, are he? You are Hick Holt, I suppose?"

"Who said I ain't? Now then, what d'ye want wi' me?"

The language, the insulting tone in which it was uttered, the bullying manner of the man—evidently relying upon his giant strength and formidable aspect—were rapidly producing their effect upon me; but in a manner quite contrary to that anticipated by Master Holt.

It was no doubt his design to awe me; but he little knew the man he had to deal with. Whether it might be called courage or not, I was just as reckless of life as he.

His dictatorial style was unendurable; and discarding all further prudential considerations, I resolved to submit to it no longer.

Before I could answer his question, however, he had repeated it in a still more peevish and impatient manner—with an additional epithet of insult.

"Wal, Mister Jay-bird," said he, "be quick 'bout it! What d'ye want w' me?"

"In the first place, Mr. Hickman Holt, I want civil treatment from you; and secondly—"

I was not permitted to finish my speech. I was interrupted by an exclamation—a horrid oath—that came fiercely hissing from the lips of the squatter.

"Civil treetmint, i'deed! You're a putty fellur to talk o' civil treetmint, arter jumpin' y'ur hoss over a man's fence, an' ridin' slap-jam inter his door, 'ithout bein' asked! Let me tell yer, Mister Gilt Buttons, I don't 'low any man—white, black, or Injun—to enter my cl'arin' 'ithout fust knowin' his reezun. Ye hear that, d'ye?"

"Your clearing! Are you sure it is yours?"

The squatter turned red upon the instant. Rage may have been the passion that brought the color to his cheeks; but I could perceive that my words had produced another emotion in his mind, which added to the hideousness of the cast at that moment given to his features.

"Not my cl'arin'!" he thundered, with the embellishment of another imprecation—"not my cl'arin'! Show me the man who says it's not!—show'm to me! By the Almighty Eternal, he won't say't twice."

"Have you purchased it?"

"Ne'er a mind for that, mister; I've made it: that's my style o' purchase, an' it'll stan' good, I reck'n. Consarn y'ur skin! what hev you got to do wi't anyhow?"

"This," I replied, still struggling to keep calm, at the same time taking the title-deeds from my saddle-bags—"this only, Mr. Holt. That your house stands upon Section No. 9; that I have bought that section from the United States Government; and must therefore demand of you, either to use your pre-emption right, or deliver the land over to me. Here is the government grant—you may examine it, if you feel so inclined."

An angry oath was the response, or rather a volley of oaths.

"I thort that wur y'ur bisness," continued the swearer. "I thort so; but jest this time you've kim upon a fool's errand. Durn the government grant! durn your pre-emption right! an' durn y'ur title-papers too! I don't valley them more'n them thur corn shucks—I don't. I've got my pre-emption dokymnt inside hyur. I'll jest show ye that, mister; an' see how ye'll like it."

The speaker turned back into his cabin, and for a moment I lost sight of him.

In another moment he reappeared in the doorway; not with any papers in his hand—but, instead, a long rifle, that with its butt resting on the door-stoop, stood almost as high as himself.

"Now, Mister Turn-me-out!" said he, speaking in a satirical, triumphant tone, and raising the piece in front of him, "thur's my title—my pre-emption right's the right o' the rifle. It's clur enuff; ye'll acknowledge that, won't ye?"

"No," I replied, in a firm voice.

"Ye won't? Look hyur, stranger! I'm in airnest. Look in my eye, an' see if I ain't! I gi' ye warnin' then, that ef ye're not out o' this cl'arin' in six jumps o' a squ'l, you'll never go out o' it a livin' man. You see that ere stump? Its shadder's jest a-creepin' up to the house: the minnit that shadder touches the wall, I'll shoot you down, as sure's my name's Hick Holt. Mind, I've gi'n ye warnin'!"

"And I give you warning, Mr. Holt, that I am prepared to defend myself; and if you miss, I shall show you no mercy. If you are going to take the cowardly advantage of having the first shot, I have my advantage too. In self-defense I shall be justified in killing you; and if you fire at me, I shall certainly do so. Be warned! I never spare a coward!"

"Coward!" exclaimed the colossus, with an imprecation that was horrible to hear.

"An' how ef I don't miss?" continued he, apparently calming his rage, and speaking with a significant sneer—intended to awe me, by insinuating the certainty of his aim. "How ef I don't miss, Mister Poppun?"

"You may, for all that. Don't be too sure of hitting—I've been shot at before now."

"You'll never be shot at arter now, 'ceptin' ye leave this cl'arin'." One crack from my gun'll be enuff for ye, I reck'n."

"I'll take my chance. If it should go against me, you won't gain by it. Remember, my good man, it's not a duel we're fighting! You have chosen to

attack me; and if I should fall in the affair, I've faith enough in the law to believe it will avenge me."

I fancied that my speech produced some effect upon the fellow; and, seeing that he remained silent, I followed it up by words of similar import:

"If it be my fate to fall, I leave behind me friends who will inquire into my death. Trust me, they will do so! If I kill you it will be but justifiable homicide, and will be so adjudged; while your killing me will be regarded in a different light; it will be pronounced *murder*!" I gave full emphasis to the last word.

On hearing it my antagonist showed signs of emotion. I fancied I saw him tremble, and turn slightly pale! With an unsteady voice he replied:

"Murder? No, no; I've gi'n ye warnin' to go. Ye've time enuff yet to save yerself. Git out o' the cl'arin', and thur'll be no harm done ye!"

"I shall not go out of the clearing, until you've acknowledged my claim."

"Then you'll ne'er go out o' it alive—I swar' niver!"

"You are determined, then, to be my *murderer*?"

I again pronounced the word in the most emphatic tone. I saw that it affected him in some singular way; whether through a fear of consequences; or that there still lingered in his heart some speck of humanity; or perhaps—but least possible of all he was beginning to be ashamed of his foul play. By which of all these three motives, or by what other inspired, I could not guess; but he seemed to cower under the imputation.

"Murderer!" echoed he, after a moment of apparent reflection. "No, no; it's bad enuf to hev the blame o' that, 'ithout bein' guilty o' it. I ain't agwine to *murder* ye; but I ain't agwine neyther to let ye go. I mout 'a' did so a minnit agone, but ye've lost y'ur chance. Ye've called me a coward; an' by the Eternal! no man 'll say that word o' Hick Holt, an' live to boast o' it. No, mister, ye've got to die; an' ye may get y'urself ready for't 's soon's ye like. Coward indeed!"

"I repeat it—your act is cowardly."

"What act?"

"Your unprovoked attack upon me—especially since it gives you the first shot. What if I were to shoot you down now? With the pistol you see in my holster here, I could send six bullets through your body before you could bring your rifle to your shoulder. What would you call that? Sheer cowardice, would it not be; and murder too?"

CHAPTER XIV. A DUEL WITHOUT SECONDS.

WHILE I was speaking, I saw a change pass over the countenance of my gigantic antagonist—as if some new resolve was forming in his mind, that affected the programme he had already traced out. Was it possible I had touched him on a point of honor? It was this purpose I desired to effect; and, though hopeless it might appear, I continued the only kind of appeal that, with such a spirit, seemed to promise any chance of success.

"You *dare* not play fair in this game," I said banteringly. "You *are* a coward, and would murder me. You want the first shot; you know you do."

"It's a lie!" cried the colossus, raising himself to his full height, and assuming an air of chivalric grandeur I could not have deemed him capable of; "it's a lie! I don't wish to murder ye; an' I don't want the first shot neyther."

"How?"

"I hain't so little confidence in my shootin' as to care for you an' y'ur gimeraek gun! Nor is Hick Holt in such consate wi' his life eyther, that he's afeard to risk it. Tho' ye-air a stuck-up critter, I won't gi' ye the opportunity to kuse me o' foul play. Thur's grit in ye, I reck'n; and seein' that's made me change my mind."

"What!" I exclaimed, taken by surprise at the speech, and fancying it promised an end to our altercation; "you have changed your mind? You mean to act justly then?"

"I mean it shall be a *fair stan'-up-fight* atween us."

"Oh! a duel?"

"Duel, or whatever else ye may call it, mister."

"I agree to that. But how about seconds?"

"D'ye think two men can't fight fair 'ithout seconds? Ye see yander stump standin' nigh the bars?"

"Yes; I see it."

"Wal, mister, thur you'll take y'ur stand—a-hine, or a-front o' it, whichever ever ye like best. Hyur's this other 'un, clost by the crib—thur'll be my place. Thur's twenty yards a-tween 'em, I reck'n. Is that y'ur distance?"

"It will do as well as any other," I replied mechanically, still under the influence of surprise, not unmingled with a sentiment of admiration.

"Dismount, then! Take your pouch an' flask along wi' ye; ye see I've got myen. One shot at ye's all I'll want, I reck'n. But ef thur shod be a miss, look out for quick loadin', an' mind, mister, thur's one o' us'll niver leave this cl'arin' alive."

"About the first shot? Who is to give the signal?"

"I've thort o' that a-ready. It'll be all right, I promise ye."

"In what way can you arrange it?"

"This way. Thur's a hunk o' deer-meat in the house; I mean to fetch that out and chuck it over thur, into middle o' the cl'arin'. Ye see them buzzarts up thur on the dead-woods?"

I nodded in the affirmative.

"Wal, it won't be long afore one o' other o' them flops down to the meat; an' the first o' 'em that takes wing, that'll be the signal. That's fair enuf, I reck'n?"

"Perfectly fair," I replied, still speaking mechanically, for the very justness of the proposal rendered my astonishment continuous.

I was something more than astonished at the altered demeanor of the man. He was fast disarming me. His unexpected behavior had subdued my ire; and, all consideration of consequences apart, I now felt a complete disinclination for the combat! Was it too late to stay our idle strife? Such was my reflection the moment after; and, with an effort conquering my pride, I gave words to the thought.

"Y'ur too late, mister! 'twon't do now," was the reply to my pacific speech.

"And why not?" I continued to urge, though to my chagrin, I began to perceive that it was an idle effort.

"Y'u've riz my dander; an' y'u've got to fight for it!"

"But surely—"

"Stop y'ur palaver! By the 'tarnal airthquake, I'll gin to think you air a coward! I thort y'd show the white feather afore 'twur over."

"Enough!" cried I, stung by the taunt; "I am ready for you, one way or the other. Go on."

The squatter once more entered his cabin, and soon came out again, bringing forth the pieces of venison.

"Now!" cried he, "to y'ur stand, and remember, neyther fires till a bird flies. Arter that, ye may g' it like blazes!"

"Stay!" said I; "there is something yet to be done. You are acting honorably in this affair—which I acknowledge is more than I was led to expect. You deserve one chance for your life; and if I should fall it will be in danger. You would be regarded as a murderer. That must not be."

"What is't you mean?" hurriedly interrogated my antagonist, evidently not comprehending my words. Without answering to the interrogatory I drew out my pocket-book, and, turning to a blank leaf of the memorandum, wrote upon it:

"I have fallen in fair fight."

I appended the date, signed my name, and, tearing out the leaf, handed it to my adversary. He looked at it for a moment, as if puzzled to make out what was meant. He soon saw the intention, however, as I could tell by his grim smile.

"You're right thur!" said he, in a drawing tone, and after a pause. "I hedn't thunk o' that. I guess this deekym't 'll be nothin' the wuss o' my name, too? What's sauce for the goose air likewise sauce for the gander. Y'ur pencil, ef ye please? I ain't much of a scholar; but I reck'n I kin write my name. Hyur goes!"

Spreading out the paper on the top of a stump, he slowly scribbled his name below mine; and then, holding the leaf before my eyes, pointed to the signature—but without saying a word. This done, he replaced the document on the stump, and drawing his knife, stuck the blade through the paper and left the weapon quivering in the wood! All these maneuvers were gone through with as cool composure as if they were only the prelude to some ordinary purpose.

"I reck'n, stranger," said he, in the same imperious tone, "that'll keep the wind from blowin' it away, till we've settled who it's to belong to. Now to y'ur place! I'm agwine to throw the deer-meat!"

I had already dismounted, and stood near him rifle in hand. Unresistingly I obeyed the request, and walked off to the stump that had been designated without saying another word, or even looking around. I had no apprehension of being shot in the back, for the late behavior of the man had completely disarmed me of all suspicion of treachery. I had not the slightest fear of his proving a traitor, and no more did I hold him to be a coward. That impression was gone long ago.

I arrived at the stump, and, turning on my heel, stood facing him. He was already in his place—with the joint of venison in one hand and his long rifle in the other. The moment was nigh when one of us should make an abrupt exit from the world!

"Now, mister!" cried my antagonist in a clear voice, "I'm agwine to chuck the meat. Remember, neyther's to fire till a bird takes wing."

I saw him swing the joint once or twice round his head; I saw it jerked aloft, and then whirling through the air; I saw it falling—falling, till the sodden sound told that it had reached the ground. It was a fearful moment!

CHAPTER XV. THE DUEL DELAYED.

FULL five minutes passed, and not one of the vultures showed signs of stirring—five minutes of prolonged and terrible suspense. It was odd that the birds had not at once swooped down upon the piece of venison: since it lay conspicuously upon the ground—almost under the tree where they were perched! A score of them there were—ranged along the dead limbs—each with an eye keen of sight as an eagle's! Beyond doubt, they observed the object—they would have seen it a mile off, and recognized it too—why, then, were they disregarding it—a circumstance so contradictory of their natural instincts and habits, that, even in that dread hour, I remarked its singularity? The cause might have been simple enough: perhaps the birds had already glutted themselves elsewhere? Some wild beast of the woods—more likely some straying ox—had fallen a victim to disease and the summer heats; and his carcass had furnished them with their morning's meal? There was evidence of the truth of this, in their blood-stained beaks and gorged maws, as also the indolent attitudes in which they roosted—many of them apparently asleep! Others at intervals stretched forth their necks, and half spread their wings; but only to yawn and catch the cooling breeze. Not one of all the listless flock showed the slightest disposition to take wing.

There were several already in the air, wheeling high aloft; and two or three had just joined their companions—increasing the cluster upon the tree. These had arrived, after we had taken our stand; and others were constantly coming down. But the signal mutually agreed to was mutually understood: it was the departure of one of the birds—not its arrival—that was to give the cue of *entree* to the tragic act—the signal for the scene of death.

Those five minutes to me appeared fifty.

In sullen silence we eye each other, with scintillating glances, watching for the signal.

The situation was more than unpleasant. I longed for the *finale*. My antagonist also showed signs of impatience. No longer preserving his statue-like pose, his body began to sway from side to side; while at intervals he stamped the ground with his heavy heel. From the increasing anger that betrayed itself in his looks, I expected an explosion. It came at length.

"Durn them buzzarts!" cried he, with a hurried gesture, "th'ar' agwine to keep us stannin' hyur till sundown. Durn the sleepy brutes! we can't wait no longer on 'em. I dare ye—"

The challenge thus commenced was never completed—at all events, I did not hear its conclusion, and know not to this hour what he meant to have proposed. His speech was interrupted, and his voice drowned, by the shrill neighing of my horse—

who seemed startled at some sound from the forest. Almost at the same instant I heard a responsive neigh, as if it were an echo from behind me. I heeded neither the one nor the other. I saw that the birds were aroused from their lethargic attitude. Some of them appeared as if pressing upon their limbs to spring upward from the tree. The deadly moment had come!

With my rifle raised almost to the level, I glanced rapidly toward my antagonist. His piece was also raised; but, to my astonishment, he appeared to be grasping it mechanically, as if hesitating to take aim! His glance, too, showed irresolution. Instead of being turned either upon myself or the vultures, it was bent in a different direction, and regarding with fixed stare some object behind me! I was facing round to inquire the cause when I heard close at hand the trampling of a horse; and almost at the same instant, an exclamation, uttered in the silvery tones of a woman's voice. This was followed by a wild scream; and, simultaneously with its utterance, I beheld a female form springing over the bars! It was that of a young girl, whom I recognized at a glance. It was she I had encountered in the forest!

I had not time to recover from my surprise before the girl had glided past me; and I followed her with my eyes, as she ran rapidly over the space that separated me from the squatter. Still mute with surprise, I saw her fling herself on the breast of my antagonist—at the same time crying out in a tone of passionate entreaty:

"Father, dear father! what has he done? Mercy! Oh mercy!"

"Good God! her father? Holt her father?"

"Away, Lil!" cried the man in a peremptory tone, removing her arms from his neck. "Away, gurl! git ye from hyur!"

"No, father! dear father! you will not? What does it mean? What has he done? Why are you angry with him?"

"Done, gurl? He's called me coward; an' 'ud drive us out o' house an' home. Git ye gone, I say! Into the house wi' ye!—away!"

"Mercy! Oh father, have mercy! Do not kill him. He is brave—he is beautiful! If you knew!"

"Brave? beautiful?—gurl, ye'r ravin'! What do you know about him? Ye've niver see'd him afore?"

"Yes, dear father! only an hour ago. If you but knew—it was he who saved me. But for him—Father! he must not—he shall not die!"

"Saved ye? What do ye mean, gurl?"

"Hilloo! what's all this rumpus?"

The familiar ejaculation, and its adjunct interrogatory, admonished me that a new personage had appeared upon the scene. The voice came from behind. On turning, I beheld the unexpected speaker—a man on horseback, who had ridden up to the bars; and having halted there was craning his neck into the inclosure—gazing upon the scene that was being enacted there, with a singular half-comic, half-satirical expression of countenance!

CHAPTER XVI. THE PEACEMAKER.

WITHOUT knowing why, I hailed the arrival of this stranger as opportune. Perhaps his presence, added to the entreaties of that fair young creature—still urgent in my behalf—might prevent the effusion of blood. Indeed, I had already determined that none should be spilled by me—let the consequences be as they might; and whatever was to be the *dénouement* of this awkward affair, I had resolved that my rifle should have naught to do in deciding it. The piece had fallen to the "order arms;" the ill-omened birds had forsaken their perch; and, now soaring in the blue sky, almost beyond the reach of human vision, their movements were no longer heeded—neither by my adversary nor myself.

Turning away from the stranger—whom I had only regarded for a second or two—I faced again to the more interesting tableau in front of me. That, too, was rapidly undergoing a change. The squatter no longer clung to his rifle. The girl had taken it from his hands; and was hurrying with it into the door of the cabin. There was no hindrance made by my antagonist! On the contrary, he appeared to have delivered it over to her—as if the affair between us was to have a pacific termination, or, at all events, a respite.

What surprised me more than all was the altered demeanor of my adversary. His whole manner seemed to have undergone a sudden change. Suddenly it must have been, since it had taken place in a second or two, while my attention was occupied by the newly arrived horseman. What still further astonished me, was, that this transformation was evidently produced by the presence of the stranger himself! That it was not due to the young girl's interference, I had evidence already. That had not moved him for a moment. Her earnest appeal had received a repulse—energetic and decisive, as it was rude; and of itself would certainly not have saved me. Beyond doubt, then, was I indebted to the stranger for the truce so unexpectedly entered upon.

The change in Holt's demeanor was not more sudden than complete. At first, an air of astonishment had been observable; after that, an expression of inquietude—becoming each moment more marked. No longer did he exhibit the proud aspect of a man, who felt himself master of the ground; but, on the contrary, appeared cowed and quailing in the presence of the new-comer—whom he had met at the entrance, and at once invited into the inclosure. This manner was observable in the half-mechanical courtesy, with which he removed the bars, and took hold of the stranger's horse—as also in some phrases of welcome, to which he gave utterance in my hearing.

For myself, I was no longer regarded, any more than if I had been one of the dead-woods that stood around the clearing. The squatter passed, without even looking at me—his whole attention seemingly absorbed by the new arrival! It was natural I should regard with curiosity an individual, whose presence had produced such a wonderful effect; and my scrutinizing gaze may have appeared rude enough to him. I cannot say that he elicited my admiration. On the contrary, his appearance produced an opposite effect. I beheld him with what might be termed an instinct of repulsion: since I could assign no precise reason for the dislike with which he had inspired me on sight.

He was a man of about thirty years of age; of a

thin spare body, less than medium height; and features slightly marked with the *bar sinister*. A face without beard—skin of cadaverous hue—nose sharply pointed—chin and forehead both receding—eyes small, but sparkling like those of a ferret—and long lank black hair, thinly shading his cheeks and brows—were the prominent characteristics of this man's portrait. His dress was of a clerical cut and color—though not of the finest fabric. The coat, trousers, and vest were of black broad-cloth—the coat and waistcoat being made with standing collars, similar in style to those worn by Wesleyan ministers—or more commonly by Catholic priests—while a white cravat not over clean and a hat with curving boat-brim, completed the saintly character of the costume.

Judging from his personal appearance, I concluded that I saw in the individual before me the Methodist minister of Swampville. If so, it would account for the obsequiousness of his host, though not satisfactorily. There was something more than obsequiousness in Holt's manner—something altogether different from that deferential respect, with which the Gospel minister is usually received in the houses of the humbler classes. Moreover, the character of the squatter—such as I had heard it, and such as I had myself observed it to be—bore no correspondence with the attitude of reverence he had so suddenly assumed. Even under the hypothesis, that the new-comer was his clergyman, I was puzzled by his behavior.

He in the ecclesiastical costume appeared to be a man of few words; and of gestures he made a like limited use; having passed me, without even the courtesy of a bow. On the contrary, I was honored with a glance of cynical regard—so palpable in its expression, as to cause an itching in my fingers, notwithstanding the saintly gown. I contented myself, however, with returning the glance, by one I intended should bear a like contemptuous expression; and, with this exchange, we separated from each other. I remained by my stand, without offering remark—either to the squatter or his guest. The only change I effected in my position, was to sit down upon the stump—where, with my rifle between my knees, I resolved to await the issue. All idea of using the weapon had gone out of my mind—at least against Hickman Holt. He was *her* father; I would as soon have thought of turning its muzzle to my own body.

I tarried, therefore, with no hostile intention. On the contrary, I only waited for an opportunity to propose some pacific arrangement of our difficulty; and my thoughts were now directed to this end. I had every chance of observing the movements of the two men; since, instead of entering the cabin, they had stopped in front of it—where they at once became engaged in conversation.

I took it for granted that I was myself the subject; but, after a time, I began to fancy I was mistaken.

Judging from the earnest manner of both—but more especially from Holt's gestures and frequent ejaculations—something of still greater interest appeared to be the theme of their dialogue. I saw the squatter's face suddenly brighten up—as if some new and joyous revelation had been made to him; while the features of his visitor bore the satisfied look of one who was urging an argument with success.

They were evidently talking of some topic beyond my affair, and unconnected with it; but what it could be I was unable even to guess. Perhaps, had I listened more attentively, I might have arrived at some knowledge of it—since words were occasionally uttered aloud—but my eyes were busier than my ears; and at that moment, neither the squatter nor his guest was the subject of my thoughts.

Beyond them was the attraction that fascinated my gaze—that thing of roseate golden hue, whose shining presence seemed to light up the dark interior of the cabin—gleaming meteor-like through the interstices of the logs—now softly moving from side to side, and now, thank Heaven! gliding toward the door! Only for a moment stood she silently on the stoop—one smiling moment and she was gone. Her fair face was once more hidden behind the *ride de jalousie* of the logs; but the smile remained. It was mine; and lingered long within the trembling temple of my heart.

CHAPTER XVII. YES—YES!

TOWARD the interior of the hut hallowed by such lovely presence, I continued to direct my glances—with an occasional side-glance, noting the movements of the two men. Whatever had been the exciting topic of discourse but the moment before, I saw that it was now changed; and that I was myself the subject of their conversation. This I could tell by their looks and gestures—evidently bearing upon me and my business.

Conscious that I was observing them—and as if desirous of conferring more privately—they passed round to the rear of the cabin; where for the time they were out of my sight, as well as hearing. So far from regretting this movement, it was just what I desired; it left me free to continue the pleasant espionage in which I had become engaged.

Now more boldly my eyes explored the dark interior of the hut—more freely roamed my glance along the interstices of the logs. Gladly should I have gone up to the doorway—fain would I have been to enter—had I not been restrained; but delicacy, and something more stood in the way; and I was forced to keep my ground. Again I saw the bright form flitting within. Gliding gently across the floor—as if on tiptoe, and by stealth—the young girl stood for a while near the back-wall of the cabin. Close behind this, the two men were conversing. Did she go there to listen? She might easily hear what was said; I could myself distinguish the voices, and almost the words.

She remained motionless; and, as I could judge, in an attitude of attention—her head lowered, and her body bent slightly forward. I was forming conjectures as to her motive, when I saw her moving away from the spot. In another instant, she appeared in the doorway—this time evidently with some design, as her manner clearly betokened. For a moment she stood upon the stoop, fronting toward me—but with her face averted, and her eyes by a side-glance directed toward the rear of the hut. She appeared to look and listen—as if noting the position of the men; and then, seemingly satisfied

that she was not herself observed, she suddenly faced round, and came running toward me!

Taken by surprise—a surprise mingled with sweet satisfaction—I rose to my feet; and stood silently but respectfully awaiting her approach. I had acted with prudence in not speaking; for I saw by her manner that the movement was a stolen one. Moreover, the finger, raised for an instant to her lips, admonished me to silence. I understood the signal, so piquantly given; and obeyed it. In another instant she was near—near enough for me to hear her words—delivered in a half-whisper. She had paused before me in an attitude that betokened the fear of interruption; and, before speaking, again cast behind her another of those unquiet looks.

"Brave stranger!" said she, in a hurried undertone, "I know you are not afraid of my father; but oh, sir! for mercy's sake, do not fight with him!"

"For your sake," I said, interrupting her, and speaking in a low but impressive tone—"for your sake, fair Lilian, I shall not fight with him. Trust me, there is no fear. I shall bear anything, rather than—"

"Hush!" said she, again motioning me to silence, at the same time glancing furtively behind her. "You must not speak; you may be heard! Only listen to me. I know why you are here. I came out to tell you something."

"I listen."

"Father does not now wish to quarrel with you; he has changed his mind. I have just heard what they said. He intends to make you a proposal. Oh, sir! if you can, please agree to it; for then there will be no trouble. I hope there will be none!"

"For you, fair Lilian, I shall agree to it—whatever the conditions be. Can you tell me what proposal he intends making me?"

"I heard him say he would sell—Oh, mercy! they are coming—if I am seen—"

The murmuring words were drowned by the louder voices of the men—who were now heard returning round the angle of the wall. Fortunately, before they had reached the front of the cabin, the young girl had glided back into the doorway; and no suspicion appeared to be entertained by either of the clandestine visit just paid me.

On rounding the corner, the stranger stopped. The squatter continued to advance, until within a few paces of where I stood. Then halting, he erected his gigantic form to its full height; and, for a moment, confronted me without speaking. I noticed that his countenance no longer bore signs of angry passion; but, on the contrary, betrayed some traces of a softer feeling—as of regret and contrition.

"Strenger!" said he at length. "I've two things to propose to ye; an' ef ye'll agree to them, thur's no need why ye an' I shed quarrel—leest of all plug one another wi' bullets, as we wur agwine to do a minnit ago."

"Name your conditions!" rejoined I, "and if they are not impossible for me to accept, I promise you they shall be agreed to."

With Lilian in my thoughts, they would be hard indeed if I could not square with whatever terms he might propose.

"They ain't impossible—neyther o' 'em; thur only just an' fair."

"Let me hear them; and believe me, Hickman Holt, I shall judge them most liberally."

"Fust, then, you called me a coward. Do you take that back?"

"Willingly I do."

"So fur good; an' now for t'other proposal I hev to make. I don't acknowledge y'ur right to this cl'arin'. I've made it; an' call it my own, as a sovereign citizen of these United States; an' I don't care a cuss for pre-emption right, since I don't believe in any man's right to move me off o' the groun' I've cl'ared. But I ain't so durned pertickler 'bout this h'ur bit. Another 'll answer my bizness equally as well—maybe better—an' ef ye'll pay me for my improvements, ye can take both cl'arin' an cabin, an' hev no more muss about it. Them's my proposals."

"How much do you expect for these improvements? At what sum do you value them?"

I trembled as I awaited the answer. My poor purse felt light as it lay against my bosom—far lighter than the heart within: though that had been heavier but an hour before. I knew that the sack contained less than two hundred dollars, in notes of the Planters' Bank; and I feared that such a sum would never satisfy the expectations of the squatter.

"Waal, strenger," replied he after a pause, "thur worth a good wheen o' dollars; but I shan't valley 'em myself. I'll leave that part o' the bizness to a third individooal—my friend as stands thur; an' who's a just man, an's been some at o' a lawyer too. He'll say what's fair atween us. Won't ye, Josh?"

I thought this rather a familiar style of address, on the part of the squatter, toward his clerical and saint-like friend; but I refrained from showing my astonishment.

"Oh, yes," replied the other, "I'll value the property with pleasure—that is, if the gentleman desires me to do so."

"How much do you think it worth?" I inquired with nervous anxiety.

"Well, I should say that, for the improvements Mr. Holt has made, a hundred dollars would be a fair compensation."

"A hundred dollars?"

"Yes—in cash, of course, I mean."

"Will you be satisfied with that sum?" said I, turning to Holt for the answer.

"Parfitly satisfied—so long's it's in cash."

"I agree to give it then."

"All right, strenger; a bargain's a bargain. You kin shell out the dollars, and I'll gi'e ye pурсession afore this gentleman, who'll witness it in writin', ef you like."

"I want no writing. I can trust to your word."

It was no flattery. I felt at the moment that the squatter—rudely as he had acted—was still possessed of an honorable principle; and I knew that, under the circumstances, his word would not only be as good as his bond, but better. I made no hesitation, therefore; but counting out the money, placed it upon the stump, alongside that curious document impaled there by the blade of the squatter's knife.

"When 'u'd ye like to take pурсession?" asked the outgoing tenant.

"At your convenience," I replied, wishing to behave as courteously as possible.

"It won't take me long to move. My furniter ain't very cumbersome, an' I k'u'd let ye in tomorrow, eft wa'n't that I hev some unexpected bizness with my friend h'ur. Say day arter the morrow? Ef ye'll kum then, ye'll find me ready to deliver up. Will that answer for ye?"

"Admirably!" was my reply.

"All right, then! I'd ask ye in, but thur's nothin' to gi'e ye, 'ceptin' that piece o' deer meat, an' it's raw. Besides, strenger, I've some partickler bizness jest now, that I'm 'bleeged to see to."

"Oh, never mind! I shall not need any refreshment till I reach Swampville."

"Waal, then, I'll bid you good-mornin', at the same time wishin' you luck o' your barg'in."

"Thanks; good-morning!"

I leaped into the saddle, and turned my horse's head toward the entrance of the inclosure. I should have given him the touch to go forward with more reluctance, had I not perceived the fair Lilian gliding out of the cabin, and proceeding in the same direction. Two or three of the bars had been replaced by the clerical visitor; and she had gone, apparently to remove them. Was it simple courtesy, or a pretense to speak with me? My heart heaved with tumultuous joy, as I fancied that the latter might be her motive. When I reached the entrance the bars were down, and the young girl stood leaning against one of the uprights; her round white arm embracing the post. Envious piece of timber!

"Promise me we shall meet again?" said I, bending down, and speaking in a half-whisper.

She looked back toward the cabin with a timid glance. We were not observed. The two men had gone into the horse-shed. In her fingers I noticed the flowers of a bignonia. She had taken it from among the golden tresses of her hair. Her cheek rivaled the crimson of its corolla, as she flung the blossom upon the saddle-bow.

"Promise me!" I repeated in a more earnest tone.

"Yes—yes!" she replied in a soft, low voice, that resembled the whisper of an angel; and then, hearing noises from the house, she passed hurriedly away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ERRAND OF LOVE.

THIS second purchase and payment rendered necessary a communication with my Nashville friend. Fortunately, Swampville had a mail; and to avail myself of it, I rode direct for the settlement. On my return, I found the river-town, figuratively speaking, on fire. Short as had been the period of my absence, it had been marked by an incident of no ordinary character.

That morning's mail had conveyed to the settlement the intelligence of a rare and interesting event—the discovery of the gold placers of California. I had heard rumors of this before—only half-believed, and not yet reaching to Swampville. Returned emigrants from California were now reported as having arrived in St. Louis and other frontier towns, bringing with them, not only the full account of the gold discovery, but its confirmation, in the shape of large chunks of gold-bearing quartz, and bags of the yellow dust itself. The marvelous tale was no longer questioned, or doubted.

The mail had brought newspapers from New Orleans and St. Louis, giving detailed accounts of the digging of Sutter's mill-race by the disbanded soldiers of the Mormon battalion; of the *crevasse* caused by the water, which had laid open the wonderful auriferous deposits, and describing also the half-frantic excitement which the news had produced in these populous cities.

In this Swampville had not been slow to imitate them. I found the little village on the *qui vive*, not only the idlers showing an interest in the extraordinary intelligence, but the business men of the place being equally startled out of their sobriety.

A "company" was already projected, in which many well-to-do men had registered their names, and even Colonel Kipp talked of transporting his *penates* across the great plains and swinging the Jackson sign upon the shores of the Pacific. Swampville was smitten with a golden mania, that seemed to promise its speedy depopulation.

Though many of my old *camarados* of the Mexican campaign found fresh vent for their energies in this new field of enterprise, for me it had no attractions whatever. I therefore resisted the solicitations of the Swampvillians to "jine thar company"—in which I was offered the compliment of a command. On that day, and at that hour, not for all the gold in California would I have forsaken my new home in the forest—under whose "boundless contiguity of shade" sparkled, in my eyes, "a metal more attractive."

Instead of longing for the far shores of the Pacific, I longed only to return to the banks of Mud Creek, and chafed at the necessary delay that hindered me from gratifying my wish. Even the generous hospitality of Colonel Kipp—amiable under the influence of golden dreams—even the smiles of Lilian's voice—to look upon the forest flowers, more especially upon the encarnated blossom of the bignonia—now to me a symbol of the sweetest sentiment. The one most prized of all I had carefully preserved. In a glass I had placed it on the dressing-table of my chamber, with its peduncle immersed in water.

My zealous care only procured me a chagrin. On returning from one of my rambles I found the flower upon the floor, crushed by some spiteful heel. Was it thy heel, Caroline Kipp? In its place was a bunch of hideous gilly-flowers and yellow daffodils of the dimensions of a drum-head cabbage—placed there either to mock my regard or to elicit my admiration. In either case I resolved upon a *renanche*. By its wound, the bignonia smelled sweeter than ever; and though I could not

restore the pretty blossom to its graceful campanulate shape, from that time forward it appeared in my button-hole—to the slight torture, I fancied, of the backwoods coquette.

On the morning of the third day, as I mounted my horse and turned his head in the direction of Holt's clearing, it was not with any design of dispossessing the squatter. Occupied with sweet love-dreams, I had as yet given no thought to the rudeness of life. I had formed no plan for colonizing—neither toward entering upon possession nor extending the "improvement" I had twice purchased.

Notwithstanding both purchase and payment, the squatter might still continue to hold his cabin and clearing and share with me the disputed land. Welcome should I make him on one condition—the condition of becoming his guest—constant or occasional—in either way, so long as I might have the opportunity of enjoying the presence of his fair daughter, and to her demonstrating my heart's devotion. Some such idea, vaguely conceived, flitted across my mind as I entered upon my second journey to Mud Creek.

My ostensible object was to take formal possession of an estate and turn out its original owner. But my heart was in no unison with such an end. It recoiled from, or rather had it forgotten, its purpose. Its throbbings were directed to a different object, guiding me on a more joyful and auspicious errand—the errand of love!

CHAPTER XIX.

A RED-SKINNED SIBYL.

NOT a sound came from the forest to disturb my sweet musings. Silent was the sky of the Indian summer—soft and balm-laden its breeze. The trees stirred not; the branches seemed extended in the stillness of repose; even the leaves of the *tremuloides* hanging on their compressed petioles, were scarcely seen to quiver. The rustling heard at intervals, was but the fluttering of bright wings amid the foliage; or the rushing of some mountebank squirrel in reckless evolution among the branches—sounds harmonizing with the scene.

Not till I had entered the glade was I aroused from my reverie—at first gently, by the sudden emergence from shade into light; but afterward in a more sensible manner on sight of a human form—at a glance recognized as that of the Indian maiden.

She was seated, or rather reclining, against the blanched log; her brown arm embracing an outstretched limb; half supported on one leg—the other crossed carelessly over it in an attitude of repose. Beside her on the log lay a wicker panner, filled with odds and ends of Indian manufacture.

Though I had ridden close up to the girl, she vouchsafed no acknowledgment of my presence. I observed no motion—not even of the eyes; which, directed downward, seemed fixed in steadfast gaze upon the ground. Nothing about her appeared to move—save the coruscation of metallic ornaments that glittered in the sun, as though her body were enveloped in scale-armor. Otherwise, she might have been mistaken for a statue in bronze. The attitude was in every way graceful; and displayed to perfection the full bold contour of the maiden's form. Her well-rounded arm entwining the branch, with her large body and limbs outlined in *alto-relief* against the entablature of the white trunk, presented a picture that a sculptor would have loved to copy; and that even the inartistic eye could not look upon without admiration.

Instinctively I checked my horse, and halted in front of this singular apparition. I can scarcely tell why I did so, since neither by look nor gesture was I invited to take such a liberty. On the contrary, I could perceive that my movement was regarded with displeasure. There was no change in the statuesque attitude; even the eyes were not raised from the earth; but a frown was distinctly traceable on the features of the girl.

Thus repulsed, I should have ridden on; and would have done so, but for that sense of awkwardness, which one feels in similar situations. By pausing in the marked manner I had done, and gazing so pointedly at the girl, I had committed an act of ill-breeding—of which I now felt sensible.

Indian though she was, she was evidently no common squaw; but gifted with certain noble traits, of which many a maiden with white skin might have envied her the possession.

Just then, I had myself no cause to fear an unrequited love—no need to be ungenerous or selfish—and could, therefore, afford to extend my sympathy to the sufferings of another. It was some vague prompting of this kind, that had caused me to draw up—some idea of offering consolation. The repelling reception was altogether unexpected, and placed me in a predicament.

How was I to escape from it? By holding my tongue, and riding on?

No; this would be an acknowledgment of having committed an act of *gaucherie*—to which man's vanity rarely accedes, or only with extreme reluctance. I had rushed inconsiderately into the mire, and must plunge deeper to get through. "We must become worse to make our title good."

So reflecting, or rather without reflecting at all, I resolved to "become worse"—with the risk of making a worse out of it. "Perhaps," thought I, "she does not recognize me?" She had not looked at me as yet. "If she would only raise her eyes, she would remember me as the friend of the White Eagle. That might initiate a conversation, and cause her to interpret more kindly my apparent rudeness. I shall speak to her at all hazards."

"Su-wa-nee!"

The dark Indian eye was raised upon me with an angry flash; but no other reply was vouchsafed.

"Su-wa-nee!" I repeated in the most conciliatory tone. "Do you not remember me? I am the friend of the White Eagle."

"And what is that to Su-wa-nee? She has no words for you—you may go on!"

This decided repulse; instead of bettering my position, rendered it still more complicated. Somewhat confusedly, I rejoined: "I am on the way to visit the White Eagle. I thought—perhaps—you might—that possibly you might have some message for him."

"Su-wa-nee has no message for the White Eagle!" replied she, interrupting me, in an indignant tone, and with a contemptuous toss of her head. "If she had, she would not choose a false pale-face like himself, to be its bearer. You fancy, white man, you

can insult the Indian maiden at your pleasure? You dare not take such liberty with one of your own color?"

"I assure you I had no such intention; my object was very different. I was prompted to speak to you, knowing something of your affair of the other night with my friend Wingrove—which you remember I was witness of. I could not help overhearing."

I was interrupted by another quick contemptuous exclamation, that accompanied a glance of mingled vexation and scorn:

"You may know too much, and too little, my brave slayer of red panthers! Su-wa-nee does not thank you for interfering in her affairs. She can promise you sufficient occupation with your own. Go! See to them!"

"How? What mean you?" I hurriedly asked, perceiving a certain significance in her looks, as well as words that produced within me a sudden feeling of inquietude.

"What mean you?" I repeated, too anxious to wait her reply; "has anything happened?"

"Go, see yourself! You lose time in talking to a squaw, as you call us. Haste! or your bell-flower will be plucked and crushed, like that which you wear so proudly upon your breast. The wolf has slept in the lair of the forest deer; the yellow fawn will be his victim! Su-wa-nee joys at it; ha, ha, ha! Hers will not be the only heart wrung by the villainy of the false pale-face. Ha, ha, ha! Go, brave slayer of red panthers! Ah! you may go, but only to grieve; you will be too late—too late—too late!"

Finishing her speech with another peal of half-maniac laughter, she snatched her pannier from the log, flung it over her shoulder, and hurried away from the spot!

Her words, though ill understood, were full of fearful significance, and acted upon me like a shock—for a moment paralyzing my powers both of speech and action. In my anxiety to ascertain their full meaning I would have intercepted her retreat; but before I could recover from my unpleasant surprise, she had glided in among the shrubbery, and disappeared from my sight.

CHAPTER XX.

A STORM WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

HEADING my horse to the path, I rode out of the glade; but with very different feelings from those I had on entering it. The words of this ill-starred maiden—attainted with that sibylline cunning peculiar to her race—had filled my heart with most dire forebodings. Her speech could not be mere conjecture, put forth to vex and annoy me? She had scarcely motive enough for this; besides, her display of a positive foreknowledge was proof against the supposition, that she was deceiving me?

"Slayer of red panthers! You may go, but only to grieve. Your bell-flower will be plucked and crushed like that you wear so proudly upon your breast."

These, and other like innuendoes, could not be conjectural? However obtained, they betokened a knowledge of the past, with an implied forecast of the future—probable as it was painful. The "yellow fawn," too. The reference was clear; Lillian Holt was the yellow fawn. But the wolf that had "slept in its lair?" Who was the wolf? Who was to make her a victim? and how?

These unpleasant interrogatories passed rapidly through my mind, and without obtaining reply. I was unable to answer them, even by conjecture. Enough that there was a wolf; and that Lillian Holt was in danger of becoming his victim!

This brought me to the consideration of the last words, still ringing in my ears: "You will be too late—too late!"

Prompted by their implied meaning, I drove the spurs into my horse, and galloped forward—as fast as the nature of the ground would permit.

A storm-cloud had suddenly obscured the sun—black as the wing of the buzzard-vulture. Red shafts were shooting athwart the sky—threatening to scathe the trees of the forest; thunder rolled continuously along their tops; and huge isolated rain-drops, like goutts of blood, came pattering down upon the leaves—soon to fall thick and continuous! I heeded not these indications. I pressed on and soon reached the clearing.

The bars were down, but it rattled not; I would have leaped the fence, had there been no gateway; but the entrance to the inclosure was free; and, galloping through it, I drew bridle in front of the hut.

The door was open—wide open, as was its wont; and I could see most of the interior. No one appeared within! No one came forth to greet me!

Inside, I observed some pieces of rude furniture—several chairs and a rough table. I had noticed them on my first visit. They were now in the same place—just as I had seen them before. One of my apprehensions was allayed by the sight; the family was still there. "Strange that no one hears me; that no one comes out to receive me!"

I made these reflections, after having waited a considerable while. "Surely I was expected? It was the time named by Holt himself? The day and hour! Was I again unwelcome? and had the squatter relapsed into his uncourteous mood?"

It certainly had the appearance; more especially, since it was raining at the moment—as if the very clouds were coming down—and I stood in need of shelter. But that grievance was little thought of. I was suffering a chagrin, far more intolerable than the tempest. Where was Lillian? Such cool reception, on her part, I had not expected. It was indeed a surprise. Had I mistaken the character of this Idyllic damsel? Was she, too, an arch creature—a coquette? Had she bestowed the blossom only to betray me?

I had looked down at the crushed corolla borne upon my breast. I had promised myself a triumph by its presence there. I had formed pleasant anticipations of its being recognized—fond hopes of its creating an effect in my favor. The flower looked drenched and draggled. Its carmine color had turned to a dull dark crimson; it was the color of blood!

I could bear the suspense no longer. I would have hailed the house; but by this time I had become convinced that there was no one inside.

After a short survey, I had remarked a change in the appearance of the cabin.

The interstices between the logs—where they had formerly been covered with skins—were now open. The draping had been removed; and a closer scrutiny enabled me to perceive, that, so far as human occupants were concerned, the house was empty!

I rode up to the door; and, leaning over from my saddle, looked in. My conjecture was correct. Only the chairs and table, with one or two similar pieces of "plenishing," remained. Everything else had been removed; and some worthless debris strewed over the floor, told that the removal was to be considered complete. *They were gone.*

It was no use harboring a hope that they might still be on the premises—outside or elsewhere near. The pouring rain forbade such a supposition. There was nowhere else—the horse-shed excepted—where they could have sheltered themselves from its torrent; and they were not in the shed. Rosinante was absent from his rude stall; saddle and bridle had alike disappeared. I needed no further assurance. They were gone.

With a heavy heart, I slid out of my saddle; led my steed under the shed; and then entered the deserted dwelling. My footfall upon the plank floor sounded heavy and harsh, as I strode over it, making a survey of the premises—my future home.

I might have observed with ludicrous surprise the queer character of the building, and how sadly it needed repair. But I was in no mood to be merry, either with the house or its furniture; and, tottering into one of the odd-looking chairs, I gave way to gloomy reflections.

Any one, seeing me at that moment, would have observed me in an attitude, more befitting a man about to be turned out of his estate, than one just entering upon possession.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VIRGIN HEART IN CIPHER.

"GONE! and whither gone?" Half aloud, I soliloquized the interrogatory. There was an echo from the empty walls, but no reply. Even conjecture failed to furnish an answer. The affair was altogether unexpected. Not anticipating that the squatter would leave his cabin before my return, I had made no inquiry either about his destination or future designs. I was, therefore, without the slightest clew as to whither he had gone.

Beyond the mere disappointment of missing an interview with Lillian—chagrin enough after such high-raised expectations—I should not have felt either uneasiness or regret. It would have been but natural to believe, that they had moved to some neighbor's house—perhaps to that up the creek, where lived the "friend of Lillian's father"—in all likelihood, the saint I had seen.

Such would have been my reflections, no doubt, had I not encountered the Indian girl. But her words of harsh warning now guided the current of my thoughts into another channel—"You may go, but only to grieve; you will be too late!"

Figurative as was her speech, and undefined its meaning, it produced within me a presentiment sufficiently real: that the removal was not a mere flit to some temporary shelter under a neighbor's roof but a departure for a distant point. Scarcely a presentiment, but a belief—a conviction.

Around me were circumstances corroborative of this view. The articles of furniture left behind, though rude, were still of a certain value, especially to a householder of Holt's condition; and had the squatter designed to re-erect his roof-tree in the neighborhood he would no doubt have taken them with him. Otherwise they were too heavy for a distant migration.

Perhaps he intended to return for them? If so—but no, there was no probability of his doing so. I need not have tried to comfort myself with the reflection. The innuendoes of the Indian had already negated the hope.

Still vaguely indulging in it, however, I cast a glance around the room in search of some object that might guide my conjectures to a more definite conclusion.

While so employed, my eyes fell upon a piece of paper carelessly folded. It lay upon the rough table—the only object there, with the exception of some crumbs of corn bread and the debris of a tobacco-pipe.

I recognized the piece of paper. It was an old acquaintance—the leaf from my memorandum book—upon which was written that laconic "last will and testament," jointly signed by the squatter and myself.

On observing this paper upon the table it did not occur to me that it had been left there with any design. My reflection was that the squatter had taken it from the stump and carried it into the house—perhaps to show it to his clerical visitor. No doubt they had enjoyed a good laugh over it, as the souvenir of a ludicrous incident; and for this very reason I resolved upon preserving it.

I had taken the document in my hand and was about depositing it in my pocket-book when my eye was attracted by some fresh writing on the paper. A slight scrutiny of the recent cipher secured for the torn leaf a deeper interest than I had before felt in it. I saw that it was the chirography of a female hand. What other than the hand of Lillian? I thought of no other.

Beyond doubt her fingers had guided the pencil—for it was pencil-writing—and guided it so deftly as to impress me with surprise and admiration. Astonished was I that she, the child of a rude squatter, should be able to set down her ideas in so fair a hand—thoughts thrilling, though simply expressed.

Ah! sweet, simple words! Trembled my own hand as I read them—trembled as from a spell of delirium—a delirium produced by the antagonistic emotions of grief and joy! Yes! both were present. In that simple inscript I had found cue for both, for there I learned the ecstatic truth that I was beloved, and along with it the bitter intelligence that my love was lost to me for ever! Words of welcome and words of woe! how could they be thus commingled? Read them and learn:

"To Edward Warfield:

"STRANGER—It is to say farewell, but I am very sad as I write these words. When you asked me to promise to meet you again I was happy. I said 'Yes.' Oh, sir! it can never be! We are going to some far place, and shall be gone before you come here, and I shall never see you again. It is very

distant, and I do not know the name of the country, for it is not in Tennessee, nor in the United States, but somewhere in the West, a long way beyond the Mississippi river and the great prairies; but it is a country where they dig gold out of the sand. Perhaps you have heard of it and might know it. I tried to know its name, but father is angry with me for speaking of you, and will not tell me; and our friend, that you saw, who is taking us with him, will not tell me either. But I shall find out soon, and if I thought you might like to know where we are gone I would write to you.

"I am glad that mother taught me to write, though I do not compose very well; but if you will allow me I will send a letter to Swampville from the first place we come to, to tell you the name of the country where we are going. I know your name, for it is upon this paper, and I hope you will not think I have done wrong, for I have written my own name beside it.

"Oh, sir! I am very sad that I am not to see you any more, for I am afraid father will never come back. I could cry all night and all day, and I have cried a deal, but I am afraid of their seeing me, for both father and his friend have scolded me, and said a many things against you. I do not like to hear them say things against you; and for that reason I try not to let them know how very sorry I am that I am never to meet you any more.

"Brave stranger! you saved my life; but it is not that, I think, that makes me so unhappy now, but something else. You are so different from the others I have seen; and what you said to me was not like anything I ever heard before; your words sounded so sweet, and I could have listened to them forever. I remember every one of them. And then I was so proud when you took the flower from me, and held it to your lips, for it made me think that you would be my friend.

"I have been very lonely since my sister Marian went away; she went with the man you saw. I hope to see her soon now, as she is somewhere out in the country where we are going to, but that will not make me happy, if I can never see you again.

"Oh, sir! forgive me for writing all that I have written; but I thought from what you said to me you would not be displeased with me for it, and that is why I have written it. But I must write no more, for my eyes are full of tears and I cannot see the paper. I hope you will not burn it, but keep it, to remember

LILLIAN HOLT."

Yes, Lillian! to the last hour of my life! Close to my bosom shall it lie—that simple souvenir of your maiden love. Sacred page! Transcript of sweet truth—hallowed by the first offerings of a virgin heart! Over, and over, and over again, I read the cipher—to me more touching than the wildest tale of romance. Alas! it was not all joy. There was more than a moiety of sadness, constantly increasing its measure. In another moment the sadness overcame the joy. I tottered toward the chair and dropped into it—my spirit completely prostrated by the conflicting emotions.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER DUEL DETERMINED ON.

INTO my saddle—off out of the clearing—away through the dripping forest—on through the sweltering swamp, I hurried. Up the creek was my route—my destination, the dwelling of the hunter, Wingrove.

I found him at home.

My arrival scarcely roused him from a dejection that, I could perceive, was habitual to him. I knew its cause; and could see that he was struggling against it—lest it should hinder him from the fulfillment of his duties as a host. It did not. There was something truly noble in this conquest of courtesy over the heart heavily laden—charged and engrossed with selfish care.

Not without admiration, did I observe the conflict. I hesitated not to confide my secret to such a man: I felt convinced that under the buckskin coat beat the heart of a gentleman. I told him the whole story of my love—beginning with the hour in which I had left him.

The tale aroused him from his apathy—more especially the episode, which related to my first meeting with Lillian, and the encounter that followed. As a hunter, this last would have secured his attention; but it was not altogether that.

The scene touched a chord in unison with his own memories; for by some such incident had he first won the favor of Marian.

As I approached the finale of the duel scene—that point where the stranger had appeared upon the stage—I could perceive the interest of my listener culminating to a pitch of excitement; and, before I had pronounced ten words in description of the clerical visitor, the young hunter sprung to his feet, exclaiming as he did so—

"Josh Stebbins!"

I continued the narrative; but I saw I was no longer listened to with attention.

Wingrove was on his feet, and pacing the floor with nervous irregular strides. Every now and then, I saw him glance toward his rifle—that rested above the fireplace; while the angry flash of his eyes was meditating some serious design.

As soon as I had described the winding up of the duel, and what followed—including my departure from Swampville—I was again interrupted by the young hunter—this time not by his speech but by an action equally significant.

Hastily approaching the fireplace, he lifted his rifle from the clefts; and, dropping the piece upon its butt, commenced loading it!

It was not the movement itself, so much as the time and manner, that arrested my attention; and these declared the object of the act. Neither for squirrel nor coon—deer, bear, nor panther—was that rifle being loaded!

"Where are you going?" I inquired, seeing that he had taken down his coon-skin cap, and slung on his pouch and powder-horn.

"Only a bit down the creek. You'll excuse me, stranger, for leavin' o' ye; but I'll be back in the twinklin' o' an eye. Thar's a bit o' dinner for ye, if you can eat cold deer-meat; an' you'll find somethin' in the old bottle thar. I won't be gone more'n a hour. I—reckon I won't."

The emphasis expressed a certain indecision,

which I observed without being able to interpret. I had my conjectures however.

"Can I not go with you?" I asked in hopes of drawing him to declare his design. "The weather has cleared up; and I should prefer riding out, to staying here alone. If it is not some business of a private nature?"

"That's nothin' partic'larly private about it, stranger; but it's a bizness I don't want you to be mixed up in. I guess ye've got y'ur own troubles now; 'thout takin' share o' myen."

"If it is not rude, may I ask the business on which you're going?"

"Welcome to know it, stranger. I'm a goin' to kill Josh Stebbins!"

"Kill Josh Stebbins?"

"Eyther that, or he shall kill me."

"Oh! nonsense!" I exclaimed, surprised less at the intention—which I had already half divined—than at the cool determined tone in which it was declared.

"I've said it, stranger! I've sworn it over an' over, an' it shall be done. 'Tain't no new notion I've tuk. I'd determined on makin' him fight long ago; for I'd an old score to settle wi' him, afore that 'un you know o'; but I niver ked get the skunk to stan' up. He allers tuk care to keep out o' my way. Now I've made up my mind he don't dodge me any longer; an', by the Eternal! if that black-hearted snake's to be foun' in the settlement—"

"He is not to be found in the settlement."

"Not to be foun' in the settlement!" echoed the hunter, in a tone that betrayed both surprise and vexation—"not to be foun' in the settlement? Surely you ain't in earnest, stranger? You see'd him the day afore yesterday?"

"True—but I have reason to think he is gone."

"God forbid! But you ain't sure o' it? What makes you think he air gone?"

"Too sure o' it; it was that knowledge that brought me in such haste to your cabin."

I detailed the events of the morning, which Wingrove had not yet heard; my brief interview with the Indian maiden—her figurative prophecy that had proved but too truthful. I described the deserted dwelling; and at last read to him the letter of Lilian—read it from beginning to end.

He listened with attention, though chafing at the delay. Once or twice only did he interrupt me, with the simple expression, "Poor little Lil!"

"Poor little Lil!" repeated he when I had finished. "She too gone wi' him!—just as Marian went six months ago! No, no!" he exclaimed, correcting himself, in a voice that proclaimed the agony of his thoughts. "No! it war different—altogether different; Marian went willin'ly."

"How know you that?" I said, with a half-concealed hope of consoling him.

"Know it? Oh, stranger! I'm sure o' it; Su-wanee sayed so."

"That signifies nothing. It is not the truer of her having said so. A jealous and spiteful rival. Perhaps the very contrary is the truth? Perhaps Marian was forced to marry this man? Her father may have influenced her; and it is not at all unlikely, since he appears to be himself under some singular influence, as if in dread of his saintly son-in-law. I noticed some circumstances that would lead one to this conclusion."

"Thank ye, stranger, for them words!" cried the young hunter, rushing forward and grasping me eagerly by the hand. "It's the first bit o' comfort I've had since Marian war tuk away! I've heerd myself that Holt war afeerd o' Stebbins; an' maybe that snake in the grass had a coil about him somehow. I confess ye, it often puzzled me, Marian's takin' it so to heart, an' all about a bit o' a kiss, which I w'n'dn't 'a' tuk if the Indian hadn't poked her lips clost up to myen. Lord o' mercy! I'd gi'e all I've got in the world to think it war true as you've sayed."

"I have very little doubt of its being true. I have now seen your rival; and I think it altogether improbable she would, of her own free will, have preferred him to you."

"Thank ye, stranger! it's kind in you to say so. She's now married an' gone; but if I thort thar had been force used, I'd 'a' done long ago what I mean to do now."

"What is that?" I asked, struck by the emphatic energy with which the last words were spoken.

"Foller him, if't be to the furrest end o' the world! Yes, stranger! I mean it. I'll go arter him, an' track him out. I'll find him in the bottom o' a Californy gold mine, or wherever he may try to hide hisself; an', by the Eternal! I'll wipe out the score—both the old 'un and the new 'un—in the skunk's blood, or I'll never set fut ag'in in the State o' Tennessee. I've made up my mind to it."

"You are determined to follow him?"

"Firmly determined?"

"Enough! Our roads lie together!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PROMISED EPISTLE.

UNDER any circumstances, a return to Swampville would have been necessary; certain pecuniary requirements called me back to that interesting village.

A journey, even across the desert, cannot be made without money; and the hundred dollars I had paid to Holt, with hotel and other incidental outlays, had left me with a very light purse. It would have taken three times as much as I was master of to provide us with the scantiest equipment required for a prairie journey; and toward this the young hunter, willing to give his all, was able to contribute nothing.

He would cheerfully have parted with his patrimony—as I with my purchase—for a very slender consideration; but, at that crisis, the Californian speculation demanded all the specie in circulation; and neither his clearing nor mine would have sold for a single dollar, had the payment been required in cash. A credit sale could not have served us in any way; and we were forced to hold on to our depreciated property—upon which not a single cent could be borrowed.

Never stood I in more need of my Nashville friend; and my appeal, already made, was promptly responded to—as I expected it would be.

On the third day after my dispatch the answer ar-

rived—with a handsome inclosure; enough to carry us across the continent, and back again if need be.

We were now ready for the road. We waited only for that other letter, that was to be the index to our destination.

How we passed our time during that interval of expectation is not worth describing. We enjoyed the hospitality of the Jackson hotel; and contrived to escape the *espieglerie* of its husband-hunting denizens, by hunting the deer of the surrounding forest.

During the whole time we went not near our respective "plantations" on Mud Creek. Wingrove had good reason for being shy of that quarter; and I had no inclination to trust myself to its souvenirs. Moreover, the hours of the mail-rider were neither fixed nor regular; and on this account I avoided a long absence from the post-office.

Six days of this expectancy I endured—six days of alternate hope and doubt—the latter at times so distressing that even in the excitement of the chase I could not procure distraction for my thoughts! More than once my comrade and I had almost ceased to hope; and half resolved to launch ourselves on the great prairie ocean—trusting to chance to guide us to the haven of our hopes.

On the sixth day we had determined upon it; and only awaited the mail that should arrive on the morning of the seventh. The seventh proved the day of joy. Our doubts were dispelled. The cloud that hung over our course was cleared away by the arrival of the expected epistle!

My fingers trembled as I took the precious billet from the hands of the postmaster. He must have observed my emotion—though I did not open the letter in his presence. The superscription was enough to tell me from whom it came. I had studied the fac-simile of that pretty cipher till it was well impressed upon my memory; and could therefore recognize it at a glance. I did not even break open the envelope till we were upon the road. The postmark, "Van Buren, Arkansas," sufficiently indicated the direction we were to take; and not till we had cleared the skirts of Swampville, and were en route for Memphis, did I enter on the pleasure of perusal. The address was simply as before:

"TO EDWARD WARFIELD."

Thus ran the letter:

"STRANGER!—I hope you got my other letter, and that you were able to read it, for I had no paper, nor pens, nor ink to write it better—only a little bit of a pencil, that was my mother's, and a leaf which father said you tore out of a book. But I think I could have wrote it better, only I was so afraid that they would see me, and scold me for it, and I wrote it in a great hurry, when they were from home, and then left it on the table after both of them had gone down to the creek to get into the canoe. I thought no one would come to the house before you, and I hoped all the morning you might come before we were gone. I would have given a great deal to have been able to see you again; and I think father would have waited till you came, only his friend would not let him stay longer, but hurried us away. But I hope you got the letter, and that you will not be offended at me for writing this one I send you, without your leave."

"I promised that if you would allow me, I would write from some place, and tell you the name of the country where we are going; but I forgot that it would be impossible for you to give me leave, as you would not see me, nor yet know where to write it to me."

"I now know what country it is, for everybody we have seen is talking about it, and saying that it is full of gold, that lies on the ground in pieces as big as hickory nuts; and I hear the name a many a time, over and over again. Father calls it 'Californy,' and some 'Californa,' and this, I suppose, is the right way of spelling it. It is near a great sea, or ocean as they call it, which is not the same that comes in at Philadelphia and New York, but far greater and bigger than the Mississippi and the Obion, and all the rivers put together. It must be a very large sea to be bigger than the Mississippi! But I am sure you must know all about it, for I have heard them say you have traveled in these far-away countries, and that you were an officer in the army, and had been fighting there with the Mexicans. I am glad you were not killed, and got safe home again to Tennessee; for if you had been killed, I should never have seen you; but now it is just as bad, if I am never to see you again. Oh, sir! I would write to you from that country when we are settled there; but I fear you will forget me before then, and will not care to hear anything more about us."

"I shall never forget our dear Tennessee. I am very sorry at leaving it, and I am sure I can never be happy in California with all its gold—for what good can gold be to me? I should so like to hear sometimes from our old home, but father had no friends who could write to us; the only one we knew is gone away like ourselves."

"Maybe, sir, you would not mind writing to us—only a very short letter, to tell us how you get on with the clearing, and whether you have made it much bigger, and built a great house upon it, as I have heard father say you intended to do. I shall always like to hear that you are in good health, and that you are happy."

"I have to tell you of a very strange thing that happened to us. At the mouth of the Obion river, when we were in the canoe at night-time—for we traveled all that night—we heard some one shouting to us, and oh, sir! it was so like your voice that I trembled when I heard it, for it appeared as if it came down out of the clouds. It was a thick mist, and we could see no one; but for all that I would have cried out, but father would not let me speak. It appeared to be right above our heads, and father said it was some wood-cutters who had climbed into a tree. I suppose that must have been it; but it was as like your voice as if it had been you that shouted, and as I knew you could not be there, it made me wonder all the more."

"We arrived at this place yesterday. It is a large town on the Arkansas river, and we came to it in a steamboat. From here we are to travel in a wagon with a great many other people in what they call a 'caravan,' and they say we shall be many months in getting to the end of the journey. It is a long time to wait before I can write again, for there are no towns beyond Van Buren, and no post to carry a

letter. But though I cannot write to you, I will not forget to think of the words you said to me, as I am now thinking of them every minute."

"In one of my mother's books which I brought with me I have read a pretty piece. It is in poetry; and it is so like what I have been thinking of you that I have learned it off by heart. It is so true-like and so pretty a piece that I thought you might like to read it, and hoping it may please you, I write it at the end of my letter, which I fear I have already made too long; but I hope you will have patience to read it all, and then read the poetry:

"I think of thee when Morning springs
From sleep with plumage bathed in dew,
And like a young bird lifts her wings
Of gladness on the welkin blue.
And when at noon the breath of love
O'er flower and stream is wandering free,
And sent in music from the grove—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

"I think of thee when soft and wide
The Evening spreads her robe of light,
And like a young and timid bride
Sits blushing in the arms of Night.
And when the moon's sweet crescent springs
In light or heaven's deep, waveless sea,
And stars are forth like blessed things—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

"Oh, sir! it is very, very true! I do think of you, and I am sure I shall do so as long as I live!"

"LILIAN HOLT."

Ah, Lilian! I, too, think of thee and thy sweet song! Simple but suggestive words! Knew I but where to address thee, you should know how responsive to them are the echoes of my heart!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CARAVAN.

WE rode on to Memphis as rapidly as our horses could travel—far too slow for our desires. Thence a steamboat carried us to Little Rock and another to Van Buren.

Many days had been consumed while waiting for each boat—so many that on arriving at Van Buren we found that the caravan had the start of us by full two weeks! Its probable route we ascertained without any difficulty—up along the Arkansas to the Rocky Mountains, through the valley of the Huerfano and the passes Robideau and Coochetopa; thence across the head-waters of the Colorado, and by the old Spanish trail to California.

It was principally a caravan of gold-seekers—adventurers of all nations. Even Indians had gone with it—of the half-civilized tribes of the frontier—red and white equally tempted by the yellow attractions spread out for them in California.

Though large, it was what is termed a light train—having more pack-animals than wagons. On this account, it would make way all the faster, and unless delayed by some accident, we might be a long time in coming up with it. It was not without a large measure of vexation that we learned how far it had got the start of us.

It would be idle to detail the incidents of a journey across the prairies. Ours differed in no way from hundreds of others that have been made and described—except, perhaps, that after reaching the buffalo range we traveled more by night than by day.

We adopted this precaution simply to save our scalps—and along with them our lives—since the buffalo range—especially upon the Arkansas—is peculiarly the stamping-ground of the hostile savage.

Here may be encountered the Pawnee and Comanche, the Kiowa and Cheyenne, the Waco and fierce Arapaho.

Though continually engaged in internecine strife among themselves, all six tribes are equally enemies to the pale-faced intruders on their domain. At this time they were said to be especially hostile—having been irritated by some late encounters with parties of ill-behaved emigrants.

It was not without great peril, therefore, that we were passing through their territory; and what we had heard, before leaving Van Buren, had made us fully conscious of the risk we were running.

To meet with one of the hunting or war-parties of these Indians might not be certain death; but certain they would be to disarm and dismount us, and that, in the midst of the great prairie ocean, is a danger that often conducts to the same *denouement*. It was not preference, then, but precaution, that led us to adopt the "secret system" of traveling by night.

Our usual plan was to lie by during the day, or for the greater part of it, concealed in some selected cover either among rocks or copewood. By stealing to a conspicuous eminence we were enabled to view the route ahead of us, and map out our journey for the night.

Upon this we would enter an hour or two before sundown; for then the Indian hunter has returned to his encampment, which can be easily avoided by seeing its smoke from afar.

We often saw their smokes, and more than once the Indians themselves; but were never seen by them, so cautiously did we carry out our measures.

In this fashion we groped our way with considerable rapidity.

Guided by the wagon-tracks—especially when there was a moon—we could travel almost as fast as by daylight. Only upon dark nights was our progress retarded; but, notwithstanding every impediment, we were enabled to travel faster than the caravan, and we knew that we were rapidly gaining upon it.

We could tell this by the constantly freshening trail; but we had a more accurate criterion in the count of the camps. By the number of these, we knew to a certainty that we were approaching the caravan.

We were in high hopes of being able to come up with it before it should enter the mountain passes—more dangerous to the traveler than even the plains themselves: because at that season more beset by bands of marauding savages.

Under the influence of these hopes we were pressing forward, with all the haste it was in our power to make, when our journey was varied by an incident of a somewhat unexpected character.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNPRAIRIE-LIKE APPARITION.

THE incident referred to occurred high up the Arkansas, at the celebrated grove known as the Big Timbers.

We had started about two hours before sundown, and were riding in a due westerly direction over a rolling prairie, the ridges of which, as ill-luck would have it, ran transversely to our course, causing the path to be constantly going upward and downward. It was not this that troubled us, but the fact that as we crested each swell we were freshly exposed to observation from a distance; and this recurring so often, kept us continually on the alert.

Once or twice we thought of halting again till after the sun had gone down, for we knew that we were treading upon dangerous ground; but failing to perceive any fresh Indian sign, we gave way to our irresolution and continued on.

We proceeded with caution, however, always ascending in stealthy silence, and peering carefully over the ridges before crossing them. After reconnoitering the intervening valleys, we would ride rapidly across to make up the time we had lost in our reconnoissance.

In this way we had traveled some eight or ten miles, until the sun was so far down that his lower limb touched the horizon. We were ascending a ridge, and had got our eyes on a level with its crest, when upon the face of another ridge, about half a mile further on, we beheld two forms outlined against the declivity.

We saw that they were human forms, and that they were Indians was our first thought; but a moment's observation convinced us we were in error.

They were afoot; Indians would have been on horseback. There was no floating drapery about their bodies—Indians would have had something of this sort; besides there were other circumstances observable in their figures and movements that negatived the supposition of their being red-skins. They were singularly disproportioned in size, one appearing at least a foot the taller, while the shorter man had twice this advantage in girth!

"What, in Old Nick's name, kin they be?" inquired my companion, though only in soliloquy, for he saw that I was as much puzzled as himself. "Kin ye make 'em out wi' your glass, cap'n?"

I chanced to have a small pocket-telescope. Adopting the suggestion, I drew it forth and leveled it. In another instant I had within its field of vision a tableau that astonished me.

The figures composing it were but two—a very tall man and a very short one. Both were dressed in round-about jackets and trousers. One, the shorter, had a little dark cap upon his head, while the height of the taller man was increased full ten inches by what appeared to be a black silk or beaver hat. The cut of their respective costumes was nearly the same, but the color was entirely different, the tall personage being all over of a bottle-green tint, while his shorter companion shone more conspicuously in sky-blue. Notwithstanding their vivid colors, neither costume had anything Indian about it.

My attention was less directed to the dress of the men than to their movements. The backs of both were toward us, and they were going forward in the same direction as ourselves. The tall man was in the lead, carrying what appeared to be two guns, one over his left shoulder and another in his right hand. He was advancing in slow, irregular strides, his thin body slightly stooped forward, and his long neck craned out in front of him as if trying to look over the ridge, whose crest he was just approaching. The short man was some half-dozen paces in the rear, and moving in a fashion altogether different. His body was bent against the hill at an angle of less than forty-five degrees with the horizon, and his short stout legs were playing in rapid steps, as if keeping time to a treadmill. He appeared to be pushing something before him, but what it was I could not guess, since it was completely covered by the disk of his body spread broadly against the hill.

It was not till he had reached the summit, and made a slight turn along the ridge, that I saw what this object was. The exclamation of ludicrous surprise that escaped my companion told me that he had also made it out.

"Good gosh, cap'n!" cried he, "look yander! Consarn my skin! ef't ain't a wheelbarra!"

A wheelbarrow it certainly was, for the two men were now traversing along the top of the ridge, and their bodies from head to foot were conspicuously outlined against the sky. There was no mistaking the character of the object in the hands of the shorter individual—a barrow beyond the shadow of a doubt—trundle and trams, box, body and spoke-wheel complete.

The sight of this homely object, in the midst of the savage prairies, was as ludicrous as unexpected; and we might have hailed it with roars of laughter had prudence permitted such an indecorous exhibition. As it was, my companion chuckled so loudly that I was compelled to caution him.

Whether my caution came too late, and that the laughter was heard, we could not tell; but at that moment the tall pedestrian looked back, and we saw that he had discovered us.

Making a rapid sign to his companion, he bounded off like a startled deer; and, after a plunge or two, disappeared behind the ridge, followed in full run by the man with the wheelbarrow.

One might have supposed that the fright would have led to the abandonment of the barrow. But no; it was taken along—hurried out of our sight in an instant—and in the next both man and machine had disappeared as suddenly as if some trap had admitted him into the bowels of the earth.

The singular fashion of their flight—the long strides taken by the gander-like leader, and the scrambling attempt at escape made by the barrow-man—produced a most comic effect. I was no longer able to restrain myself, but joined my companion in loud and repeated peals of laughter.

In this merry mood, and without any apprehension of danger, we advanced toward the spot where the odd figures had been seen. Some broken ground delayed us, and as half a mile of it had to be passed over, we were a considerable time in reaching the summit of the hill.

On arriving there, and looking over the swell, behind which they had disappeared, neither tall nor short man was to be seen. A timbered valley lay beyond; into this they had evidently escaped. The

track of the wheelbarrow, where it had pressed down the grass, alone indicated their recent presence upon the spot—as it did also the direction they had taken. Their retreating from us was easily accounted for; they could have seen only the tops of our heads, and had no doubt taken us for Indians!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FOOT OF THIRTEEN INCHES.

THE presence of the wheelbarrow explained a point that had been puzzling us for some days. We had fallen upon its track more than once, and supposed it to have been made by the wheel of a cart; but in no instance being able to find the corresponding one, had given it up as a hopeless enigma. The only explanation we had succeeded in offering ourselves was, that some light cart had accompanied the caravan—the load of which, being badly balanced, had thrown the weight upon one wheel, allowing the other to pass over the ground without making an impression. As it was only on dry grass we had traced it, this explanation had sufficed—though far from being satisfactory. Neither my companion nor myself ever thought of a wheelbarrow. Who would, in such a place?

"In the name o' Old Nick, who kin they be?" asked Wingrove, as we halted on the ridge, where the fugitives had been last seen.

"I'm not without my suspicions," I replied, just then thinking of a peculiarity that had but slightly occupied my attention—the cut and color of their dresses. "If I am not mistaken, the two shy birds that have fled from us are a brace of Uncle Sam's eagles."

"Sojers?"

"In all probability."

"But what 'ud sojers be a-doin' out hyar?"

"Traveling to California, like ourselves."

"Desarters, may be?"

"Just what I suspect. No doubt the pair have slipped off from some of the frontier posts; and having no opportunity to provide themselves with a better means of transport, have brought the wheelbarrow with them. It is ludicrous enough, but by no means improbable. There are some queer customers in the service of Uncle Sam."

"I think there be—ha! ha! ha! What shed we do, cap'n? Hedn't we better catch up to 'em?"

"That, comrade, may be easier said than done. If they're deserters—and they must be, if they're soldiers at all—they'll take precious good care not to let any one come near them, if they can help it. The escort that accompanies the train will account for their not being along with it. If they've caught a glimpse of my buttons, they'll be cached by this time."

"They only see'd our heads. I reck'n they tuk us for 'Injuns'?"

"In that case, they'll hide from us all the same—only a little more cunningly."

"Consarn their sojer skins! Ef they war as cunning as a kuppel o' possums, they can't hide the track o' the berra; an' so long's they keep in the timber, I kalk'late I kin lift thar trail. I reck'n I ain't quite forgot how; though I am bamfuzzled a bit by these hyar prairies—consarn them! Ah! them woods, cap'n! it diz one good to look at 'em!"

The eyes of the young hunter sparkled with enthusiasm as he spoke.

It was a real forest that was before us—a large tract covered with gigantic cottonwood trees, and the only thing deserving the name of forest we had seen for many days.

As my companion stood gazing upon it, I could trace upon his countenance a joyous expression, that rarely appeared there. The sight of the "Big Timbers" recalled to him the forests of his own Tennessee—with happy memories of other times. They were not unmingled with shadows of regret; as I could tell by the change that came stealing over his features.

"We must try to overtake them," said I, without answering to the ebullition. "It is important for us to come up with them. Even if they be deserters, they are white men; and all whites are friends here. They muster two guns; and if these fellows are what I take them to be, they know how to handle them. We must follow them; there's no time to be lost."

"Ye're right thar, cap'n! The night's comin' down fast. It's a'ready gittin' dark; an' I'm afeerd it'll be tough trackin' under the timber. If we're to catch up wi' them the night, we hain't a minnit to spare."

"Let us forward then!"

Crossing the ridge, we descended rapidly on the other side—the track of the wheel guiding us in a direct line to the nearest point of the woods. We could tell that the barrow had been trundled down the hill at top speed—by the manner in which the iron tire had abraded the surface of the slope. We had no difficulty in following the trace as far as the edge of the timber, and for some distance into it; but there, to our great surprise, the wheel-track abruptly ended! It was not that we had lost it by its having passed over dry or rocky ground. On the contrary, around the spot where it so suddenly disappeared, the surface was comparatively soft; and even an empty barrow would have made an impression sufficiently traceable, either by my companion or myself.

After beating about for some time, and extending our circle to the distance of a hundred yards or so, we failed to recover the sign. Certainly the barrow had not gone further—at all events, not upon its trundle. Instinctively, we turned our eyes upward—not with any superstitious belief that the fugitives had made a sudden ascent into the air. But the idea had occurred to us, that they might have hidden themselves in a tree, and drawn the barrow up into it. A single glance was sufficient to satisfy us that this conjecture was erroneous. The thin foliage of the cottonwoods offered no cover. A squirrel could hardly have concealed itself among their branches.

"I've got it!" exclaimed the hunter, once more seeking along the surface. "Hyar's thar tracks; tho' thar ain't no signs of the berra. I see how they've blinded us. By gosh! thar a kuppel o' cunning' old coons, whosomever they be."

"How have they managed it?"

"Tuk up the machine on thar shoulders, an' toted it that-away! See! thar's thar own tracks! They've gone out hyar—atween these two trees."

"Right, comrade!—that appears to be the way they've done it. Sure enough there is the direction they have taken."

"Well! ef I wa'n't bothered wi' these hyar animals, I ked follow them tracks easy enough. We'd soon kum upon the wheel ag'in, I reck'n; they ain't a-goin' to travel far, wi' a hump like thet on thar shoulders."

"No; it's not likely."

"Wal, then, cap'n, s'pose we leave our critters hyar, an' take arter 'em afut? We kin quarter the groun' a good bit ahead; an' I guess we'll eyther kum on them or thar berra afore long."

I agreed to this proposal; and, after securing our four quadrupeds to trees, we started off into the depth of the woods.

Only for a short distance were we able to make out the footsteps of the men: for they had chosen the dry sward to walk upon. In one place, where the path was bare of grass, their tracks were distinctly outlined; and a minute examination of them assured me of the correctness of my conjecture—that we were trailing a brace of runaways from a military post.

There was no mistaking the print of the regulation shoe. Its shape was impressed upon my memory as plainly as in the earth before my eyes; and it required no quartermaster to recognize the low, ill-rounded heel and flat pegged soles. I identified them at a glance; and saw, moreover, that the feet of both the fugitives were incased in the same cheap *chaussure*. Only in size did the tracks differ; and in this so widely, that the smaller was little more than two-thirds the length of the larger one! The latter was remarkable for size—not so much in its breadth as length, which last was not less than thirteen standard inches.

On noting this peculiarity, my companion uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "Thar's a fut, an' no mistake!" cried he. "I reck'n 'twar Long-legs as made them tracks. Well! ef I hedn't see'd the man hisself, I'd 'a' swore thar war giants in these parts!"

I made no reply, though far more astonished than he. My astonishment sprung from a different source; and was mixed up in my mind with some old memories. *I remembered the foot!*

CHAPTER XXVII.

TRACKING THE TRUNDLE.

YES, I had seen that foot before; or one so very like it, that the resemblance was cheating me. This could hardly be. With the exception of its fellow, the foot of which I was thinking could have no counterpart on the prairies; it must be the same.

At first, my recollections of it were but vague. I remembered the foot associated with some ludicrous incidents; but what they were, or when and where they had occurred, I could not say. Certainly I had seen it somewhere; but where? No matter: the foot recalled no unpleasant associations. I felt satisfied it was a friendly one; and was now more anxious than ever of overtaking its sesquipedalian owner.

After proceeding a short distance, the shoe-tracks again became too indistinct to follow further. By quartering, however, we came upon them once more—at a place where the impressions were deep and clearly defined. Once more the immense foot rose upon the retina of my memory—this time more vividly—this time enabling me to place it; for I now remembered many an odd incident that had secured it a corner on the page of my recollections.

Sticking through a stirrup with an enormous Mexican spur on its heel—its owner mounted on a horse thin and rawboned as himself—I remembered the foot, as well as the limbs and body to which it was attached. Beyond a doubt, the tall fugitive we were following was an old fellow campaigner—a veteran of the Rifle Rangers!

The figure, as seen through the telescope, confirmed me in the belief. The long limbs, arms, and neck—the thin, angular body—all were characteristics of the bodily architecture of Jephthah Bigelow.

I no longer doubted that the taller of the two men was my old follower "Jeph Bigelow," or "Sure-shot," as his Ranger comrades had christened him; and appropriate was the designation—for a surer shot than Jeph never looked through the hind-sights of a rifle. Who the little man might turn out to be, I could not guess—though I was not without some recollections of a figure resembling his. I remembered a certain Patrick, who was also a "mimber of the corpse," and whose *build* bore a close resemblance to that of him seen between the trams of the barrow.

My conjecture as to who the men were, increased my desire to overtake them. If the tall man should turn out to be Sure-shot, a rifle would be added to our strength worth a dozen ordinary guns; and considering the risk we were running—in danger of losing our scalps every hour in the day—it was of no small importance that we should join company with the deserters.

We made every exertion, therefore, to come up with them, my comrade employing all the lore of the backwoods, in his effort to recover their traces. On striking into an old buffalo-path, our eyes were once more gladdened by the sight of the wheel-track, plainly imprinted in the mud.

Our prospecting was for the time at an end. The barrow-track continued along the buffalo-path; and we were able to follow it, almost as fast as our legs could carry us.

Even after it had grown too dark for us to see the track of the wheel, we were not disconcerted. We could follow it by the feel, stopping only at intervals to make sure that it was still among our feet. In this way we had traveled to the full distance of a mile from the place where our horses had been left, when all at once the barrow-track gave out. The buffalo-path continued on; but no barrow had passed over it, unless carried as before. This was improbable, however, and we were forced to the conclusion that the two men had turned off by some side-path we had not observed.

While looking for this, a sound reached our ears, that resembled the murmur of a distant waterfall; but, listening more attentively, we could distinguish in it a different intonation.

We at once moved in the direction whence the noise came, and before we had advanced a hundred yards through the thickly standing trees, we were

aware that what we heard was the sound of human voices.

Another hundred yards brought us within hearing of the words—at the same time that a luminous reflection cast upward upon the trees, indicated that there was a fire at no great distance off. The underwood hindered us from seeing the fire; but guided by its gleam, we continued to advance.

After making another long reach through the leafy cover, we got the fire well under our eyes, as well as those who had kindled it. We had no conjecture as to whether we had been following the true track, or whether it was the two runaway travelers we had treed. The point was determined by an object seen standing close to the fire, in the full glare of its ruddy light. Need I say it was the wheelbarrow?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BRACE OF "OLD SOJERS."

Yes, it was the wheelbarrow, and the "U. S. Ordnance" branded upon its side, and visible under the light of the blazing pile, told whence it had come. Either Fort Gibson or Fort Smith was minus a barrow, drawn from their stores by no very formal requisition.

There were the takers of it—one on each side of the fire—presenting as great a contrast as could well be found in two human beings. Although of the same species, the two individuals were as unlike each other as a tall greyhound to a turnspit.

Both were seated, though in different attitudes. The little man was squatted—that is, with legs crossed under him, after the fashion of tailors. The long legs of his *vis-a-vis* would scarcely admit of being thus disposed of, and his weight was resting altogether upon his hips and heels. In this posture, the caps of his knees stood up to the level of his shoulders—so that his body, viewed *en profile*, presented a pretty accurate imitation of the letter N—that sort termed by engravers the "rustic letter." The huge black hat capped one extremity, and the long pedal-like feet that rested horizontally on the ground terminated the other, completing the alphabetical resemblance.

A face, with a certain mocking monkeyish expression, but without any trait of fierceness or ill-nature—a nose slightly snub—quick scintillating eyes—a chin, tipped with a little tuft of clay-colored beard—some half-dozen queue-like tangles of bright yellowish hair, hanging down behind the hat—the hat itself a black silk, badly battered—such were the salient points of the portrait appearing above the knee-caps of the taller man.

With the exception of the tile, his costume was altogether military—to me well known. It was the ordinary undress of the mounted rifles; a dark-green round-about of coarse cloth—with a row of small brass buttons from throat to waist, and overalls of the same material. In the particular sample before us, overalls was rather an inappropriate name. The garment so designated scarcely covered the calves of the wearer's legs—though of these there was not much to cover. The jacket appeared equally scant, and between its bottom border and the waistband of the trousers there was an interval of at least six inches. In this interval was seen a shirt of true Isabella color, which also appeared over the breast, the jacket being worn unbuttoned. The frouzy cotton was visible at other places, peering through various rents both in jacket and trousers. A black leather stock concealed the collar of the shirt—if there was any—and though the stock itself was several inches in depth, there were other several inches of naked neck rising above its rim. Coarse woolen socks, and the cheap contract shoe completed the costume of Sure-shot, for it was he.

His contrasting comrade was equally in military garb—even more so by the additional article of a cloth forage-cap. His was also an undress uniform; but though of very similar cut to the other, and resembling it in the quality of the material, the color was different. It was sky-blue, turned white with wear—the buttons of the jacket being of lead, and the facings of white worsted tape. It was a better fit than the green uniform; and its wearer had evidently some conceit in the style of it—as was evidenced by the jacket being carefully buttoned from waist to throat, and the forage-cap set jauntily on three hairs.

The little man was an "infantry." His horizontal diameter was twice that of his tall companion of the rifles; and in the rounded contour of his body, not an angle was apparent. His garments were quite filled by his body, arms and legs—so that there was not a wrinkle to be seen anywhere. It was a form usually styled dapper. His face was also of the rotund shape—the features all tolerably regular, with the exception of the nose—that, like the nasal organ of his comrade, was *à la retrousse*—the turn-up being infinitely more pronounced. The expression was equally indicative of good-nature and good-fellowship, as the apple-like bloom of his cheeks, and the ocherous tinge upon the tip of the nose, sufficiently testified. Cheeks, lips and chin were beardless, with the exception of a thick stubble that had lately sprung up; but some well-greased rings of a darkish color ruffling out under the rim of his forage-cap, showed that the "infantry" was not insensible to the pride of hair. Neither in regard to him had I made a mistaken conjecture. Another old acquaintance and comrade-in-arms; the redoubtable Patrick O'Tigg, a true son of the "Sad."

The two worthies, when first seen, were seated as described, both engaged in a very similar occupation—cooking.

Each held in his hand a long sapling, upon the end of which a piece of red meat was impaled; and this, projected over the fire, was fast blackening in the blaze. More of the same meat—buffalo-beef, it appeared—was seen in the wheelbarrow; its other freight being one or two greasy bags, a brace of knapsacks, a cartouche box and belt, two ordnance spades, with the guns—a regulation rifle and musket—lying across the top of the load.

It was evident from this collection that the men were deserters; that they had armed and equipped themselves at the expense of the quartermaster.

Perhaps the paymaster had been in arrears with them, and they had adopted this ready and effectual method of wiping out the score. My only wonder was at not seeing a brace of branded horses along with them; but in all probability, on the day—or night—of their departure, the stable sentry had been doing his duty.

On becoming assured of the identity of the two individuals, my first impulse was to step forward to the fire, and make myself known to them.

So eagerly were both engaged in attending to their spits, that they had neither seen nor heard us—although they themselves were now silent, and we were within less than twenty feet of them. The intervening bushes, however, would have sheltered us from their sight, even if they had been a little more vigilant, as I should have expected Sure-shot to have been. They were trusting all to the thicket in which they had pitched their camp; and, being hungry and wearied no doubt, were for the moment off their guard.

Some fantasy decided me not to disturb them for a moment—a sort of curiosity to hear what they would say, and, if possible discover their whence and whither. We were perfectly within ear-shot, and could have heard even a whisper passing from their lips, as we could also note the expression upon their faces. A sign to my companion was sufficient; and crouching behind the leafy screen, we awaited the continuation of the suspended dialogue.

Our patience was not put to a severe test.

O'Tigg was not the man to keep his tongue in tranquillity for any extended time. Neither was Sure-shot an admirer of the silent system. Both were talkers. On this occasion the "infantry" was the first to make himself heard.

"Be jabbers! comrade, I'm afther thinkin' f'what purty fools us hiv bin, to tak it afut this way, loike two thramps, whin wes moight ivery bit as wil hav bin stroidin' a pair ov good pownies. We cowl'd 'a' fitched a pair from the fort wid all the aize in the world."

"Yees, Petrick, certing ye ain't fer 'stray 'bout thet pertickler; we've been rather ungumtious."

"Besoides, wez moight as wil hav been hung for a shape as a lamb. We'll be flogg'd all as wan, iv the iskhort foinds us, fur taykin' the guns, an' the knapsacks, an' the whaleborra—bad luck to the borra!"

"No, Petrick, don't cuss the berra—it has served us for certing. We kedn't 'a' got along 'thout the machine—how ked we? We ked niver hev toted our doin's es we've did; an' but for the piece o' bacon an' thet eer bag o' meal, we'd 'a' sterved long afore this, Irecking. Don't cuss the berra."

"Och! it's made my showlders ache, as if some skhoundrel had been b'atin' them wid a sprig ov shillaylah!"

"Ne'er a mind 'bout thet! yer showlders 'll be all right arter ye've got a wink o' sleep. Spank my skin! ef thet 'ere wa'n't a cute dodge—it's throwd the Idyens off o' the scent for certain; or we'd 'a' heerd some 'ut o' them verming afore this."

"Faith, I think we've sicksaided in bamboozling thim, shure enough."

The meat by this time showed sufficiently done; and the two men applied themselves to eating, with an earnestness that allowed no time for talking. The conversation had revealed enough of their past actions, and future designs, to confirm the conjectures I had already formed about them.

Both had evidently become tired of their respective services. The routine of a frontier post is of itself sufficient to produce the deadliest ennui; and the Californian attraction had "capped the climax." The temptation was too strong for either Yankee or Hibernian nature to resist; and these worthy types of both had taken French-leave of the fort. It was thus that I epitomized the recent history of my old *camarados*.

As they were evidently aware of the caravan being in the advance, and had been following it, it was easily conjectured that Fort Smith—a military post on the Arkansas opposite Van Buren—had been the scene of their defection. Very likely, they had kept near the train all along the route—with a view to guidance and protection—as also for a *dernier resort* to which they might betake themselves in case of their stores giving out. The escort, hinted at, would be sufficient to account for their not being in closer communication with the caravan.

It appeared, they had been so far fortunate in escaping an encounter with Indians; but this, as in our case, was most likely due to the passage of the caravan. We knew that the red-skinned robbers would be too much occupied with the train itself and its more immediate stragglers, to be looking out for any so far in the rear as we; and to this circumstance, no doubt, were we indebted for the uninterrupted travel we had achieved. A greater proximity to the train would have rendered our passage more perilous.

Sure-shot, though a slouch in his dress, was no simpleton. The trick of taking up the barrow was, no doubt, a conception of his brain, as well as its being borne upon the shoulders of the Irishman—who, in all likelihood, had performed the role of wheeling it from Fort Smith to the Big Timbers, and was expected to push it before him to the edge of the Pacific Ocean! It was evident that Patrick was tired of his task; for they had not made much progress in their Homeric supper, before he once more returned to the subject.

"But shure now, comrade! we moight manage widout the borra—secin' as we've 'a' into the buffalos' country. Aren't them bagas as alyz to kill as tame cows? Shure we'd niver be widout mate as long as our powder lasts!"

"Jess t'other way, ye fool! We're a-going out o' the buffuler country, an' into perts where theer ain't an aymnal bigger than a ret. On t'other side o' the mountings, theer ain't no beests o' any kind—neery one; an' it's jess theer we'll want that eer bag o' meal. Ef we don't take it along, we'll sterve for certing."

"Be me sowl! I'd rather carry the male on my showlders. There's liss of it now; an' maybe I could manage it, iv yould only carry the spids, an' thim other things. We moight l'ave the knapsicks an' kyarthridge-box behind. What use 'ud they be in Kalifornya? They'll only lade to our detection by the throops out there."

"Don't ee be skeert 'bout thet, kimrade! Ef theer's troops in Californya, they'll hev theer hands full 'thout troublin' us, I recking. We ain't like to be the only two critters as 'hain't got a pass for the diggin's. Ne'er a bit o't. We'll find deserters out theer es thick as blue-bottles on a karkiss. Certingly we shell. Besides, Petrick, we needn't take knapsacks all the way out theer, nor the berra neythur, nor nuthin' else we've brought from the Fort."

"F'what div yez mane?" interrogated the Irishman, evidently puzzled to interpret the other's speech.

"We kin leave all them fixin's in Morming City."

"But will the thrain be afther thravelin' that way? Shure ye don't know that."

"Certing it will. A putty consid'able pert o' it air mad e up o' Mormings, an' they'll be boun' to the Salt Lake. We kin foller them an' drop t'other. In the Morming settlements we kin swop our unyforms for suthin' else, an' the berra too. Es to the knepsacks an' ca'tridge-box, I guess as how I intend to make a spec on them ere two articles."

"F'what! a pair ov soger knapsacks an' an owld kyarthridge-box! They w'uld'n't fitch the worth ov dhrinks apiece."

"Theer you're mistaking, Mister Tigg. Prechaps they'll swop better'n you think. How d'ye know I ain't like to git a beest apiece for 'em—eyther a mule or a hoss? This child ain't a-going to fut it all the way to Californya. B'yont the Morming City, he rides a spell, I recking."

"Be japers! that's an out-an'-out good oidea. But how dew ye mane to carry it through?—that's what bothers Patrick O'Tigg."

"We—ell, Petrick, I'll tell ee my plan. I ain't got it straightened out yet, but I hope to hev it all right by the time we're on the t'other side the mountings—leastwise before we reaches Morming City."

"Arrah! f'what is it?" inquired the impatient Irishman.

The Yankee did not vouchsafe an immediate answer, but while polishing off the bone he held in his hand appeared at the same time to be busy with some mental operation—perhaps straightening out the plan he had promised to reveal.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TOUGH STORY.

For some seconds the two worthies observed a mutual silence, broken only by a formidable rattle of teeth, as large "chunks" of buffalo-meat were put through their respective masticating machines. Sure-shot, resuming the conversation, at last said:

"Ye see, kimrade, these Mormings, es I've heern, air mighty taken up wi' sogerin', an' thet sort o' thing. Ye've heerd talk o' theer great bettelion. They'll be arter these eer trappings for certing, since they hain't much chence o' gittin' soger-fixings out theer. We—ell, what I mane to do is to put the knepsacks off on 'em for some new improvement o' pattern. I guess it air thet—I've heerd say so at the Fort—then the Morming fineral, who are the propheth self, an' who's got berr'ls o' dollars—he'll buy the knepsacks at any price. Now, d'ye take, Mister Tigg?"

"Troth do I. But dew ye think yez can fool thim so alyz?"

"Easy as eatin' punkin pie. Jehosophet! I hain't been five year in the tradin' line 'thout le'rnin' the biz'ness, I recking."

"Be me faith! yez must have been raal cliver at it whin ye sowld thim cypress-knees for bacon! ams to the Bawltimoreans. You remember that story yez towd us down in Mixico?"

"Yees; certingly I remember it—he, he, he! But I kim a better trick than thet on the Orleans people 'bout five year ago—jest 'fore I jined the Rangers."

"F'what was it, shure?"

"We—ell, ye see, I wa'n't allers as poor es I'm now. I hed a partnership in a bit o' a schooner, es used to trade between Bosting an' Orleans, an' we used to load her wi' all sorts o' notions, to sell to the Orleans folk. Jehosophet an' pork pies! they air fools, an' no mistake, them Creole French. We ked 'a' sold 'em wooden nutmegs, an' brick-dust for Cayenne pepper, an' such like; an' I 'bout guess es how we did spekoolate a keetle in thet line o' bizness. Wall, there kim a time when they tuk a notion they ked make cheap brogan, as they call 'em, out o' alligator's leather, an' supply the hul nigger market wi' 'em. The neels were dear, an' so they tuk to usin' boot-pegs; but not hevin' a manafact'ry o' the pegs down south they hed to git 'em from the no'th. Jest then my pertner an' I thought o' makin' a spekoollashun on the pegs; so we loaded our schooner wi' thet eer freight, chuck right up to the hatches; an' then sot off from Bosting for Orleans. We thort we'd make our derved fortune out thet eer trip."

"Shure yez did, didn't ye?"

"No—o—o; ne'er a bit o' 't. It keemed nigh breakin' us."

"Arrah, how?"

"We—ell, ye see, when we got roun' to Orleans we learned that the boot-trade hed a'most stopped. The alligator leather didn't turn out jest the thing for brogans; an' besides, it got sca'ce by reezun o' the killin' o' them varming. In coorse, the pegs hed fell in price; they'd kim down so low that we ked only git twenty-five cents a bushel for 'em."

"Mother ov Moses! only twenty-five cints a bushel!"

"Thet was all they'd fetch—offer 'em when an' wheer we woul'd. In coorse, we wa'n't fools enough to take thet—the dernation pegs hed cost us more in Bosting."

"Bivil a doubt ov it! But f'what did yez do wid 'em, anyhow?"

"We—ell, Mister Tigg, we weer cleer beet at fust; an' didn't know what to do—neyther me'r my pertner. But arter takin' a good think over it, I see'd a way o' gitting out o' the scrape—leastwise 'thout sech a loss as sellin' the pegs at twenty-five cents the bushel. I see'd a chence o' gitting rid o' them at fifty cents."

"Arrah, now! in f'what way, comrade?"

"You've see'd boot-pegs, I recking, Mister Tigg?"

"An' sure I hiv. Aren't they the same that's in these sutlers' brogues we've got on—bad luck to them?"

"Jess the same—only whittier when they air new."

"Be japers! I think I remember seein' a barrel full ov thim in New Yark."

"Very certing it were them—they air usooly packed in berr'ls. Can you think o' anything they looked like?"

"Wil, in troth, they looked more loike oats than anything I can recollect. Shure they did look moighty like oats!"

"An' don't ee kalkerlate they'd 'a' looked more like oats, ef they'd been pointed at both ends instead o' one?"

"In troth they woul'd—all that same."

"We—ell, that's the very idee thet kem inter my mind at the time."

"Arrah, now, is it? An' f'what did yez do wid the pegs then?"

"Jest sharpened the other eends o' 'em an' sold 'em for oats."

The puzzled, half-incredulous stare on the countenance of the Hibernian, was ridiculous in the extreme.

The allegation of the Yankee had deprived him of speech, and for some moments he gazed at the latter, evidently in doubt whether to give credence to the story, or reject it as a little bit of a "sell" upon the part of his comrade—with whose eccentricity of character he was well acquainted.

Equally ludicrous was the look of gravity on the other—which he continued to preserve under the continued gaze of his comrade, with all the solemnity of a judge upon the bench.

It was as much as my companion and I could do to restrain our laughter; but we were desirous of witnessing the finale of the affair, and, by an effort, succeeded in holding in.

"Och, now, Misthur Shure-shot!" gasped the Irishman at length, "an' it's only jokin' ye arr?"

"Truth I tell ye, Petrick—every word o' 't. Ye see the oats weer jest then sellin' at fifty cents the bushel, an' thet paid us. We made a little suthin', too, by the speekolashun."

"But how did yez get the other inds pointed at all—at all?"

"Oh, thet weer eezy enough. I invented a machine for thet, an' run 'em through in less'n no time. When they kim out at t'other end o' the machine, I kedn't meself 'a' told 'em from oats."

"Och! now I comprehend. Arrah! an' wasn't it a square thrick? Be me sowl, it bates Bannagher all t' paces! Ha! ha! haw!"

Wingrove and I could hold in no longer, but joining in the loud cachinnation—as if we had been its echoes—sprung forward to the front.

Infantry and rifleman bounded to their feet, with a simultaneous shout of "Indians!" and dropping their spirits and half-eaten *appolas* of meat, dashed into the bushes like a pair of frightened rabbits.

In an instant, both were out of sight; and their whereabouts was alone indicated by the rattling of the branches as they passed through them.

I was apprehensive of losing them altogether; and regretted not having used more caution in approaching them. At that crisis an idea came to my aid; and giving out an old signal, well remembered by *ci-devant* rangers, I had the gratification of receiving a double response. The utterance of the signal had brought them to an instantaneous halt; and I could hear them exchanging surmises and exclamations of astonishment, as they retraced their steps toward the fire.

Presently, a pair of short, stub-nosed faces were seen peering through the leaves, while from the lips of their owners burst simultaneously, "The cyp-tin!" "The captin!" with various other phrases in their respective *patois*, expressive of surprise and recognition.

A few words sufficed to explain all. As we had surmised, the men were deserters. Neither of the men attempted to deny what, in time of peace is not considered a very heinous crime; and for which, just then, the "Californian fever" was considered an ample justification. It was no affair of ours. I was only too rejoiced to join company with the runaways, of whose loyalty to myself I had proofs of old. Their guns—more especially the rifle of Sure-shot—would be a valuable addition to our strength; and, instead of crawling along under the cover of the night, we might now advance with more freedom and rapidity.

It was determined therefore, to share our means of transport with our new comrades—an offer by them eagerly and readily accepted. The partial consumption of our stores had lightened the packs upon our mules; and the contents of the wheelbarrow, equally divided between them, would give to each only its ordinary load.

The barrow itself was abandoned—left among the Big Timbers—to puzzle at a future period some red-skinned archæologist—Cheyenne or Arapaho!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ABANDONED BOUQUET.

HAVING passed Bent's Fort—of wide celebrity in trapper lore, whilom the scene of many a wild revel of the mountain men, but now abandoned and in ruins—we arrived at the confluence of the Huerfano. As we expected, the trace turned up the valley of this latter stream, thus deciding the route taken by the caravan.

We rode on through a forest of grand cottonwoods and willows, and at about seven miles distant from the mouth of the Huerfano river, reached a point where the caravan had crossed over to its left bank. On the other side we could see the ground of their encampment of the night before. We could tell it by the fresh traces of animals and wagons, *debris* of the morning's repast, and half-burnt fagots of the fires that had cooked it, still sending up their clouds of oozing smoke.

The stream at this point was fordable, and crossing over, we stood upon the deserted camp-ground. With singular emotions I walked amid the smoldering fires, forming conjectures as to which of them might have been graced by that fair presence. Where had she passed the night, and what had occupied her thoughts? Were those gentle words still lingering in her memory? Were they upon her lips? It was pleasant for me to repeat them. I did not need to draw the writing forth. Long since were the lines fixed in my remembrance—oft through my heart had vibrated the burden of that sweet song:

"I think of thee—I think of thee!"

I sought around for some souvenir.

The remains of a fire, a little apart from the rest, near the edge of a piece of copse-wood, drew my attention. It looked as if it had been a spot on which some family group had encamped. I was led to this conjecture by observing some flowers scattered near—for the grassy sward showed no other sign. The flowers betokened the presence of woman-kind. Fair faces—or one at least—had beamed in the light of that fire. I felt morally certain of it. I approached the spot.

The shrubbery around was interlaced with wild roses, while blue lupins and scarlet pelargoniums

sparkled over the glade, under the sheltering protection of the trees. By the edge of the shrubbery lay a bouquet, that had evidently been put together with some care!

Dismounting, I took it up. My fingers trembled as I examined it, for even in this slight object I read indications of design.

The flowers were of the rarest and prettiest—of many kinds that grew not near. They had been plucked elsewhere. Some one had given both time and attention to their collection and arrangement.

Who? It would have been idle to shape even a conjecture, but for a circumstance that appeared to offer a certain clue; and not without bitter thoughts did I try to unwind it. The thread which was warped around the flower-stalks was of yellow silk. The strands were finely twisted, and I easily recognized the bullion from the tassel of a sash. That thread must have been taken from the sash of a dragoon officer!

Had the bouquet been a gift? To whom, and by whom? Here all conjecture should have ended; but not without a feeling of painful suspicion did I examine those trivial signs; and the feeling continued to annoy me long after I had flung the flowers at my feet.

A reflection came to my relief, which went far toward restoring my spirit's equanimity. If a gift, and to Lilian Holt, she had scarcely honored it, else how could the flowers have been there? Had they been forgotten, or left unregarded? There was consolation in either hypothesis; and, in the trust that one or the other was true, I sprung back into my saddle, and with a more cheerful heart rode away from the spot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

THE finding of the flowers, or rather the reflections to which they gave rise, rendered me more anxious than ever to come up with the caravan.

The little incident had made me aware of a new danger hitherto unthought of.

Up to that hour my chief anxiety with regard to Lilian Holt had been the companionship of the Mormon. This had been heightened by some information incidentally imparted by the deserters—chiefly by Sure-shot. It related to the destination of a number of the emigrants who accompanied the caravan, and with whom the rifleman had held intercourse, previous to their departure from Van Buren. These were not prospective gold-diggers, but persons migrating westward for motives more spiritual; they were *Saints* bound for the Salt Lake, there intending to stay and settle.

There was a large party of these Latter-day converts, under the conduct of an apostolic agent. This much had Sure-shot ascertained. He had not seen their leader, nor heard his name. Joshua Stebbins might be the very man? Even as a conjecture, this was bitter enough. Up to the time of joining with the deserters, I had consoled myself with the belief that California was the destination of this saint and his squatter *protege*, though at times I was troubled with the remembrance of Su-wa-nee's words. Their truth was almost confirmed by the report of the ex-rifleman. I could not now think otherwise than that Stebbins was bound for the Mormon city; and that he was the fox in charge of the flock of geese that accompanied the emigrant train. It was more than probable.

While waiting in Swampville for the letter of Lilian, I had learned something of the history of the *ci-devant* schoolmaster—not much of the period subsequent to his departure from that place—little more than the fact that he had joined the Mormons, and had risen to high office in their church—in short, that he was one of their "apostles." This fact, however, was one of primary significance.

Had the squatter also submitted to the hideous delusion? Was he also on his way to the shrine of the faith? The answer to the former question was of slight importance, so long as that to the latter might be conceived in the affirmative. If Holt was bound to the Salt Lake, then was the fate of his daughter to be dreaded.

Suffering under such apprehensions, I scarcely needed the additional stimulus of jealousy to urge me onward; and yet, strange as it may appear, the finding of the bouquet had produced this effect. I would have ridden on, without halt, but our animals required rest. We had been traveling nearly all night, and throughout the morning, under the friendly shelter of the cottonwood forest. We all needed an hour or two of repose; and, seeking a secure place near the ground of the deserted camp, we stopped to obtain it. The train could not be far ahead of us.

While seated in silence around the fire we had kindled, we could hear at intervals the reports of guns. They came from up the valley, and from a far distance. The sounds reached us but faintly, now single shots, and then two or three together, or following in quick succession. We were at no loss to account for the reports. They were caused by the hunters of the caravan, in pursuit of game. We had now entered that charming region where elk and antelope abounded. On our morning march we had seen herds of both trooping over the sward, almost within range of our rifles. Even as we sat, a band of beautiful antelopes appeared in the open ground near our bivouac fire; and, after satisfying their curiosity by gazing at us for a moment, they trotted off into the covert. It was a tempting sight—too tempting for the young backwoods hunter to resist.

Seizing his rifle, he took after them, promising us as he went off a more savory breakfast than the dry buffalo-meat we were broiling. Soon after, we heard the report of his piece; and, presently, he reappeared with a dead prong-horn upon his shoulders.

As Wingrove came up to the fire, I noticed a singular expression upon his countenance. Instead of being rejoiced at his success, his looks betrayed anxiety! I questioned him as to the cause. He did not answer directly; but, drawing me to one side, inquired in a whisper, if I had seen any one in his absence.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"If it wa'n't altogether impossible, I'd swar I see'd that girl."

"What girl?" I trembled as I put the question: "That darnationed devil of a Chicasaw."

"What? Su-wa-nee?"

"Yes, Su-wa-nee."

"Oh, that cannot be? It could not be her?"

"So I'd 'a' thort myself; but darn me, cap'n! if I kin b'lieve it wa'n't her. What I see'd war as like her as two eggs."

"What did you see?"

"Why, jest arter I'd killed the goat, an' war heisting it on my shoulders, I spied a Injun glidin' into the bushes. I see'd it war a squaw; an' jest the picter o' the Chicasaw. She 'peared as ef she hed kim right from hyar, an' I thort you must 'a' see'd her."

"Did you get sight of her face?"

"No, her back war torst me, an' she kep' on 'thout turnin' or stoppin' a minnit. 'Twar the very duds that girl used to wear, an' her bulk to an inch. It kudn't 'a' been liker her. Darn me, ef 'twa'n't eyther her or her ghost!"

"It is very improbable that it could have been either?"

I did not for a moment entertain the idea that it was the Chicasaw he had seen; and yet my comrade was fully impressed with the belief, and reiterated the assertion that he had either seen Su-wa-nee or her "shadder." Though the thing was improbable, it was not beyond possibility. We knew that there were Indians traveling with the train; we had heard so before starting out. But what likelihood was there of Su-wa-nee being among them? Certainly not much. That there were prairie Indians around us, was probable enough. We had already observed their traces upon the ground of the deserted camp. The squaw seen by Wingrove might be one of these.

Whether or not, her presence proved the proximity of red-skins; and the knowledge of having such dangerous neighbors, summoned us to a fresh exercise of vigilance and caution.

Our fire was instantly extinguished; and, contenting ourselves with a morsel of the half-broiled buffalo-beef, we moved to some distance from the spot, before proceeding to cook the antelope.

A dark covert in the thick woods offered us a more secure kitchen. There we rekindled our fire—and roasting the ribs of the prong-horn, refreshed ourselves with an ample meal.

After an hour's repose, we resumed our journey—in confident expectation, that before sunset we should get within sight of the caravan.

CHAPTER XXXII.

UP THE CANYON.

WE had not ridden far from our halting-place when we arrived at the end of the great cottonwood forest. Beyond that the trace led over open ground here and there dotted by groves and "islands" of timber. Through these we threaded our way, keeping as much as possible among the trees.

Further on we came upon a gorge—one of the noted canyons through which the Huerfano runs. Here the river sweeps down a narrow channel, with rocky banks that rise on each side into precipitous cliffs of stupendous height.

To avoid this gorge—impassable for wheeled vehicles—the wagon-trace, below its entrance, turns off to the right; and we perceived that the caravan had taken that direction. To get round the heads of the transverse ravines that run into the canyon, a detour must be made of not less than ten miles in length. Beyond the canyon, the trace once more returns to the stream.

The notes of a military reconnoissance had forewarned me of this deviation; and, furthermore, that the trace passes over a ridge altogether destitute of timber.

To follow it, therefore, in the broad light of day, would expose our little party to view. If hostile Indians should be hanging after the caravan they would be sure to see us, and equally certain to make an attack upon us; and from the traces we had noticed at the night-camp—to say nothing of what Wingrove had seen—we knew there were Indians in the valley.

They might not be hostile; but the chances were ten to one that they were; and, under this supposition, it would be imprudent in us to risk crossing the ridge before nightfall.

There were two alternatives: to remain under the timber till after sunset, and then proceed by night; or to push on into the canyon, and endeavor to make our way along the bed of the stream. So far as we knew, the path was an untried one; but it might be practicable for horses. We were now on the most dangerous ground we had yet trodden—the highway of several hostile tribes, and their favorite tenting-place, when going to, or returning from, their forays against the half-civilized settlements of New Mexico.

The proximity of the caravan—which we calculated to be about ten miles ahead of us—only increased our risk. There was but little danger of the Indians attacking that: the train was too strong, even without the escort. But the probability was, that a band of Indian horse-thieves would be skulking on its skirts—not to make an attack upon the caravan itself, but as wolves after a gang of buffalo, to sacrifice the stragglers.

Unless when irritated by some hostile demonstration, these robbers confine themselves to plundering; but in the case of some, murder is the usual concomitant of plunder.

The delay of another night was disheartening to all of us—but especially so to myself, for reasons already known.

If we should succeed in passing through the canyon, perhaps on the other side we might come in sight of the caravan.

Cheered on by this prospect, we hesitated no longer; but hastening forward, entered between the jaws of the defile.

A fearful chasm it was—the rocky walls rising perpendicularly to the height of many hundreds of feet—presenting a grim *facade* on each side of us. The sky above appeared a mere strip of blue, and we were surrounded by a gloom deeper than that of twilight. The torrent roared and foamed at our feet, and the trail at times traversed through the water.

There was a trail, as we soon perceived; and what was more significant, one that had recently been traveled! Horses had been over it; and in several places the rocky pebbles that should otherwise have been dry, were wet by the water that had dripped from their fetlocks. A large troop of horses must

have passed just before us. Had the dragoon escort gone that way? More likely a party of mounted travelers belonging to the train? And yet this did not strike us as being likely.

We were soon convinced that such was not the case.

On riding forward, we came upon a mud deposit, at the mouth of one of the transverse ravines, over which led the trail. The mud exhibited the tracks distinctly and in a more significant light—they were *hoof-tracks*. We saw that more than a hundred horses had passed up the defile, and not one *shod* animal among them.

This fact was very significant. They could not have been troop-horses? Nor yet those of white men? If ridden, they must have been ridden by Indians? It did not follow that they were ridden. We were traveling through a region frequented by the mustang. Drovers had been seen upon our route, at great distances off; for these are the shyest and wildest of all animals. A *caballada* may have passed through the gorge, on their way to the upper valley?

There was nothing improbable in this. Although the plains are the favorite habitat of the horse, the mustang of Spanish America is half a mountain animal, and often penetrates the most difficult passes, climbing the declivities with hoof as sure as that of a chamois.

Had these horses been ridden? That was the point to be determined, and how?

The sign was not very intelligible, but sufficiently so for our purpose. The little belt of mud-deposit was only disturbed by a single line of tracks, crossing it directly from side to side. The animals had it in single file. Wild horses would have *crowded over it*, some of them at least kicking out to one side or the other? This I myself knew. The reasoning appeared conclusive. We had no longer a doubt that a large party of Indians had gone up the gorge before us, and not very long before us.

It now became a question of advance or retreat.

To halt within the defile, even had a halting-place offered, would have been perilous above all things. There was no spot where we could either conceal ourselves or our animals. The mounted Indians might be returning down again; and finding us in such a snug trap, would have us at their mercy. We did not think, therefore, of staying where we were. To go back was too discouraging. We were already half through the canyon, and had ridden over a most difficult path, often fording the stream at great risk, and climbing over bowlders of rock that imperiled the necks, both of ourselves and our animals.

We determined to keep on.

We were in hopes that the Indians had by this time passed clear through the gorge, and ridden out into the valley above. In that case there would be no great risk in our proceeding to the upper end.

Our expectations did not deceive us. We reached the mouth of the chasm, without having seen other signs of those who had preceded us than the tracks of their horses.

We had heard sounds, however, that had given us some apprehension—the reports of guns—not as during the early part of the day, in single shots, but in half-dozens at a time, and once or twice in large volleys, as if of a scattering *fusillade*. The sounds came from the direction of the upper valley, and were but faintly heard, so faintly that we were in doubt as to whether they were the reports of firearms. The grumbling and rushing of the river hindered us from hearing them more distinctly. But for the presence of Indians in the valley, about which we were quite certain, we should, perhaps, not have noticed the sounds, or else have taken for something else. Perhaps we might have conjectured, that a gang of buffaloes had passed near the train, leading to a brisk emptying of rifles. But the presence of Indians rendered this hypothesis less probable.

We still continued to observe caution. Before emerging from the defile, we halted near its entrance, Wingrove and myself stealing forward to reconnoiter. An elevated post, which we obtained upon a shelf of the rock, gave us a commanding prospect of the upper valley. The sight restored our confidence; *the caravan was in view!*

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ORPHAN BUTTE.

THE landscape over which we were looking was one that has long been celebrated, in the legends of trapper and *cibolero*, and certainly no lovelier is to be met with in the midland regions of America. Though new to my eyes, I recognized it from the descriptions I had read and heard of it. There was an idiosyncrasy in its features—especially in that lone mound rising conspicuously in its midst, which at once proclaimed it the valley of the *Huerfano*. There stood the "Orphan Butte." There was no mistaking its identity.

This valley is in reality a level plain, flanked on each side by a continuous line of bluffs or "benches," themselves forming the abutments of a still higher plain, which constitutes the general level of the country. The width between the bluffs is five or six miles; but at the distance of some ten miles from our point of view, the cliffs converge, apparently closing in the valley in that direction. This, however, is only apparent. Above the butte is another deep canyon, through which the river has cleft its way.

The intervening space is a picture fair to behold. The surface, level as a billiard table, is covered with *gramma* grass, of a bright, almost emerald verdure. The uniformity of this color is relieved by cotton-wood copses, whose foliage is but one shade darker. Commingling with these, and again slightly darkening the hue of the frondage, are other trees, with a variety of shrubs or climbing plants, as clematis, wild roses, and willows. Here and there a noble poplar stands apart, as if disdaining to associate with the more lowly growth of the groves.

The butte itself, rising in the center of the plain, and towering nearly two hundred feet above the general level, has all the semblance of an artificial work—not of human hands, but a cairn constructed by giants.

Just such does it appear—a vast pyramidal cone, composed of huge prismatic blocks of granite, black almost as a coal—the dark color being occasioned by an iron admixture in the rock. For two-thirds of

its slope, a thick growth of cedar covers the mound with a skirting of darkest green. Above this appear the dark naked prisms—piled one upon the other, in a sort of irregular crystallization, and ending in a summit slightly truncated. Detached bowlders lie around its base, huge pieces that having yielded to the disintegrating influences of rain and wind, had lost their balance, and rolled down the declivity of its sides.

No other similar elevation is near—the distant bluffs alone equaling it in height. But there the resemblance ends; for the latter are a formation of stratified sandstone, while the rocks composing the butte are purely granitic!

Even in a geological point of view, is the Orphan Butte isolated from all the world. In a double sense, does it merit its distinctive title.

Singular is the picture formed by this lone mound, and the park-like scene that surrounds it—a picture rare as fair. Its very framing is peculiar. The bench of light-reddish sandstone sharply outlined on each edge—the bright green of the sward along its base—and the dark belt of cedars cresting its summit, form, as it were, a double molding to the frame. Over this can be distinguished the severer outlines of the great Cordilleras; above them, again, the twin cones of the Wa-to-yah; and grandly towering over all, the sharp sky-piercing summit of Pike's Peak. All these forms gleaming in the full light of a noonday sun, with a heaven above them of deep ethereal blue, present a picture that for grandeur and sublimity is not surpassed upon the earth.

A long while could we have gazed upon it; but an object that came at once under our eyes, turned our thoughts into a far different channel.

Away up the valley, at its furthest end, appeared a small white spot—little bigger to our view than the disk of an archer's target. It was of an irregular roundish form; and on both sides of it were other shapes—smaller and of darker hue. We had no difficulty in making out what these appearances were; the white object was the tilt of a wagon, the dark forms around it were those of men—mounted and afoot!

It must have been the last wagon of the train, since no other could be seen; and as it appeared at the very end of the valley—in the angle formed by the convergence of the cliffs—we concluded that there the canyon opened into which the rest had entered.

Whether the wagon seen was moving onward, we did not stay to determine. The caravan was in sight; and this, acting upon us like an electric influence, impelled us to hasten forward.

Calling to our companions to advance, we remounted our horses, rode out of the gorge, and kept on up the valley.

We no longer observed the slightest caution. The caravan was before our eyes; and there could be no doubt that, in a couple of hours, we should be able to come up with it. As to danger, we no longer thought of such a thing. Indians would scarcely be so daring as to assail us within sight of the train? Had it been night, we might have reasoned differently; but, under the broad light of day, we could not imagine there was the slightest prospect of danger. We resolved therefore, to ride direct for the wagons without making halt.

Yes—one halt was to be made. I had promised the *ci-devant* soldiers to make civilians of them before bringing them face to face with the escort; and this was to be accomplished by means of some spare wardrobe which Wingrove and I chanced to have among our packs. The place fixed upon as the scene of the metamorphosis was the butte—which lay directly on our route.

As we rode forward, I was gratified at perceiving that the wagon still remained in sight. If it was moving on, it had not yet reached the head of the valley. Perhaps it had stopped to receive some repairs? So much the better; we should the sooner overtake it.

On arriving at the butte, the white canvas was still visible; though from our low position on the plain, only the top of the tilt could be seen.

While Wingrove was unpacking our spare garments, I dismounted and climbed to the summit of the mound—in order to obtain a better view. I had no difficulty in getting up—for, strange to say, a trail runs over the Orphan Butte, from southeast to northwest, regularly aligned with Pike's Peak in the latter direction, and with Spanish Peaks in the former! But this alignment was not the circumstance that struck me as singular. A far more curious phenomenon came under my observation.

The path leading to the summit was entirely clear of the granite blocks that everywhere else covered the declivities of the mound. Between these it passed like a narrow lane, the huge prisms rising on each side of it, piled up in a regular trap-like formation, as if placed there by the hand of man. The latter hypothesis was out of the question. Many of the blocks were a dozen feet in diameter, and tons in weight. Titans alone could have lifted them! The summit itself was a table of some twenty by forty feet in superficial extent, and seamed by several fissures. Only by following the path could the summit be reached without great difficulty. The loose bowlders rested upon one another in such fashion that even the most expert climber would have found difficulty in scaling them, and the stunted spreading cedars that grew between their clefts combined in forming a *chevaux de frise* almost impenetrable.

I was not permitted to dwell long on the contemplation of this geological phenomenon.

On reaching the summit, and directing my telescope up the valley, I obtained a tableau in its field of vision that almost caused me to drop the glass out of my fingers! The whole wagon was in view down to its wheel-tracks, and the dark forms were still around it. Some were afoot, others on horseback, while a few appeared to be lying flat along the sward. Whoever these last may have been, I saw at the first glance what the others were.

The bronzed skin of naked bodies—the masses of long, sweeping hair—the plumed crests and floating drapery—were perfectly apparent in the glass—and all indicating a truth of terrible significance that the forms thus seen were those of savage men! Both they on horseback and afoot were Indians beyond a doubt. And those horizontally extended? They were *white* men—the owners of the wagons?

This truth flashed on me as I beheld a fearful object—a body lying head toward me, with its crown of mottled red and white gleaming significantly through the glass. I had no doubt as to the nature of the object; it was a scalpless skull!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RAISING A RAMPART.

I KEPT the telescope to my eye not half so long as I have taken in telling of it. Quick as I saw that the men stirring around the wagon were Indians, I thought only of screening my person from their sight.

To effect this I dropped from the summit of the rock on the opposite side from that facing toward the savages. Showing only the top of my head, and with the glass once more leveled up the valley, I continued my observation. I now became assured that the victim of the ensanguined skull was a white man; that the other prostrate forms were also the bodies of white men, all dead—all, no doubt, mutilated in a similar manner.

I was interrupted by a sudden movement on the part of the savages. Those on horseback were seen separating from the rest; and, the instant after, appeared coming on in the direction of the butte.

The movement was easily accounted for. My imprudence had betrayed our presence. I had been seen while standing on the summit of the mound. I felt regret for my own rashness; but there was no time to indulge in the feeling, and I stifled it. The moment called for action—demanding all the firmness of nerve and coolness of head which, fortunately, I had acquired by the experience of similar crises.

Instead of shouting to my comrades—as yet unconscious of the approaching danger—I remained upon the summit without uttering a word, or showing a sign that might alarm them. My object in so acting was to avoid the confusion consequent upon a sudden panic, and keep my mind free to think over some plan of escape.

The Indians were still five miles off. It would be some minutes at least before they could attack us. Two or three of these could be spared for reflection. After that, it would be time to call in the counsel of my companions.

Escape by flight appeared hopeless. On the shortest survey of the circumstances I perceived that our only chance lay in defending ourselves. The chance was not much worth; but there was no alternative. We must stand and fight, or fall without resisting. From such a foe as that coming down upon us, we need expect no grace—not a modicum of mercy. Where was our defense to be made? On the summit of the butte? There was no better place in sight—no other that could be reached, offering so many advantages. Had we chosen it for a point of defense, it could not have promised better for the purpose. As already stated, the cone was slightly truncated—its top ending in a *m-sa*. The table was large enough to hold four of us. By crouching low, or lying flat upon it, we should be screened from the arrows of the Indians, or such other weapons as they might use. On the other hand, the muzzles of four guns pointed at them, would deter them from approaching the base of the butte.

Scarcely a minute was I in maturing a plan, and I lost less time in communicating it to my companions. Returning to them as fast as I could make the descent, I announced the approach of the Indians.

The announcement produced a surprise sufficiently unpleasant, but no confusion.

The old soldiers had been too often under fire to be frightened out of their senses at the approach of an enemy, and the young hunter was not one to give way to a panic. All three remained cool and collected as they listened to my hurried detail of the plan I had sketched out for our defense. There was no difficulty in inducing them to adopt it. All agreed to it eagerly and at once; in short, all saw that there was no alternative.

Up the mound again—this time followed by my three comrades—each of us heavily laden. In addition to our guns and ammunition, we carried our saddles and mule-bags, our blankets and buffalo-robes. It was not their intrinsic value that tempted us to take this trouble with our *impedimenta*, our object was to make with them a rampart upon the rock.

We had just time for a second trip, and, flinging our first loads up to the table, we rushed back down the declivity. Each seized upon such objects as offered themselves—valises, the soldiers' knapsacks, joints of the antelope lately killed, and the noted meal-bag—all articles likely to avail us in building our bulwark.

I had just time to bid farewell to my Arab, to run my fingers along his smooth arching neck, to press my lips to his velvet muzzle. Brave steed! tried and trusty friend! I could have wept at the parting. He made answer to my caresses; he answered them with a low whimpering neigh. He knew there was something amiss, that there was danger. Our hurried movements had apprised him of it; but the moment after, his altered attitude, his flashing eyes, and the loud snorting from his spread nostrils, told that he perfectly comprehended the danger. He heard the distant trampling of hoofs; he knew that an enemy was approaching. I heard the sounds myself, and rushed back up the butte. My companions were already upon the summit, busied in building the rampart around the rock. I joined them, and aided them in the work.

Our paraphernalia proved excellent for the purpose—light enough to be easily handled, and sufficiently firm to resist either bullets or arrows. Before the Indians had come within hailing distance, the parapet was completed; and, crouching behind it, we awaited their approach.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WAR-CRY.

THE war-cry "How-ow-owgh-aloo-oo!" uttered loudly from a hundred throats, comes pealing down the valley. Its fiendish notes, coupled with the demon-like forms that give utterance to them, are well calculated to quail the stoutest heart. Ours are not without fear. Though we know that the danger is not immediate, there is a significance in the tones of that wild slogan. They express more than the usual hostility of red to white; they breathe a spirit of vengeance. The gestures of menace, the brandished spears and bended bows, the war-clubs

waving in the air, are all signs of the excited anger of the Indians. Blood has been spilled—perhaps the blood of some of their chosen warriors—and ours will be sought to a certainty. We perceive no signs of a pacific intent, no semblance that would lead us to hope for mercy. The foe is bent on our destruction. He rushes forward to kill!

I have said, that the danger was not immediate. I did not conceive it so. My conception was based upon experience. I had met the prairie Indians before, in the South; but North or South, I knew that their acts were the same.

It is a mistake to suppose that these savages rush recklessly upon death. Only when their enemy is far inferior to them in numbers, or otherwise an undermatch, will they advance boldly to the fight. They will do this in an attack upon Mexicans, whose prowess they despise; or sometimes in a conflict with their own kind, when stimulated by warrior pride, and the promptings of the tribal vendetta. On other occasions they are sufficiently careful of their skins, more especially in their encounter with the white trappers, or even travelers who enter the prairies from the East. The mere hope of plunder will not tempt even the boldest of red-skinned robbers within the circle of a rifle's range. They all know from experience the deadliness of its aim.

Most probably plunder had been their motive for attacking the train, but their victims could only have been some straggling unfortunates, too confident in their security. These had not succumbed without a struggle. The death of all of them proved this, since not a prisoner appeared to have been taken. Further evidence of it was seen upon the sword; for as the crowd scattered, I observed through the glass several corpses that were not those of white men. The robbers, though victorious, had suffered severely; hence the vengeful yells with which they were charging down upon us. With all their menace both of signs and sounds, I had no fear of their charging up the mound, nor yet to its base. There were fifty yards around it within range of our guns; and the first who should venture within this circle would not be likely to go forth from it alive.

"Not a shot to be fired, till you are sure of hitting! Do not one of you pull trigger, till you have sighted your man!"

This was the order passed around. On the skill of my comrades I could confide—on Sure-shot with all the certainty which his *sobriquet* expressed; and I had seen enough of the young hunter to know how he handled his rifle. About the Irishman alone was there a doubt—only of his coolness and his aim—of his courage there was none. In this, the "infantry" was perhaps equal to any of us.

The words of caution had scarcely parted from my lips, when the enemy came galloping up.

Their yelling grew louder as they advanced; and its echoes, ringing from the rocks, appeared to double the number of their wild vociferations. We could only hear one another by calling out at the top of our voices. But we had little to say. The time for talking had expired; that of action had arrived.

On come the whooping savages, horrid to behold; their faces, arms, and bodies frightfully painted, each after his own device, and all as hideous as savage conception can suggest. The visages of bears, wolves, and other fierce animals, are depicted on their breasts and shields—with the still more horrid emblems of the death's head, the cross-bones, and the red hand. Even their horses are covered with similar devices—stained upon their skins in ochre, charcoal, and vermillion!

The sight is too fearful to be fantastic. On they come, uttering their wild "Howgh-owgh-ahoo!" brandishing their various weapons, and making their shields of *parfleche* rattle by repeated strokes against their clubs and spears—on comes the angry avalanche!

They are within a hundred yards of the butte. For a moment we are in doubt. If they charge up the declivity, we are lost men. We may shoot down the foremost; but they are twenty to one. In a hand-to-hand struggle, we shall be overwhelmed—killed or captured—in less than sixty seconds of time!

"Hold your fire!" I cried, seeing my comrades lie with their cheeks against their guns; "not yet! only two at a time—but not yet! Ha! as I expected."

And just as I had expected, the wild ruck came to a halt—those in the lead drawing up their horses, as suddenly as if they had arrived upon the edge of a precipice!

They had come to a stand just in the nick of time. Had they advanced but five paces further, at least two of their number would have tumbled out of their saddles. Sure-shot and I had each selected our man, and agreed upon the signal to fire. The others were ready to follow.

All four barrels resting over the rampart had caught the eyes of the Indians. A glance at the glistening tubes was sufficient. True to their old tactics, it was the sight of these that had halted them!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RED HAND.

THE whooping and screaming are for a while suspended. Those in the rear have ridden up; and the straggling cavalcade becomes massed upon the plain, at less than two hundred yards' distance from the butte. Shouts are still heard, and talking in an unknown tongue; but not the dread war-cry. That has failed of its effect, and is heard no longer.

Now and then young warriors gallop toward the butte, vaunt their valor, brandish their weapons, shoot off their arrows, and threaten us by word and gesture. All, however, keep well outside the perilous circumference covered by our guns.

We perceive that they, too, have guns, both muskets and rifles—in all, a dozen or more! We can tell that they are empty. Those who carry them are dismounting to load. We may expect soon to receive their fire; but, from the clumsy manner in which they handle their pieces, they need not terrify us—any more than their arrows, already sent, and falling far short.

Half a dozen horsemen are conspicuous. They are chiefs, as can be told by the eagle-plumes sticking in their hair, with other insignia on their breasts and bodies. These have ridden to the front, and are grouped together—their horses standing head to head. Their speeches and gesticulations declare

that they are holding council. The movements of menace are no longer made. We have time to examine our enemies. They are so near that I need scarcely level the glass upon them; though through it I can note every feature with minute distinctness.

They are not Comanches. Their bodies are too big, and their limbs too long, for these Ishmaelites of the southern plains. Neither are they of the Jicarilla-Apache; they are too noble-looking to resemble these skulking jackals. More like are they to the Cayguas. But no—they are not Cayguas. I have met these Indians, and should know them. The war-cry did not resemble theirs. Theirs is the war-cry of the Comanche. I should have known it at once. Cheyennes they may be—since it is their especial ground? Or might it be that tribe of still darker, deadlier fame—the hostile Arapaho? If they be Arapahoes, we need look for no mercy.

I sweep the glass over them, seeking for signs by which I may identify our enemy. I perceive one that is significant. The leggings of the chiefs and principal warriors are fringed with scalps; their shields are encircled by similar ornaments. Most of these appendages are of dark hue—the locks long and black. But not all are of this kind or color.

One shield is conspicuously different from the rest. A red hand is painted upon its black disk. It is the totem of him who carries it. A thick fringe of hair is set around its rim. The tufts are of different lengths and colors. There are tresses of brown, blonde, and even red; hair curled and wavy; coarse hair; and some soft and silky.

Through the glass I see all this, with a clearness that leaves no doubt as to the character of these varied *chevelures*.

They are the scalps of whites—both of men and women! And the red hand upon the shield? A red hand? Ah! I remember.

There is a noted chief of the name, famed for his hostility to the trappers, famed for a ferocity unequalled among his race, a savage who is said to delight in torturing his captives, especially if it be a pale-face who has had the misfortune to fall into his hands.

Can it be that fiend—the Red-Hand of the Arapahoes?

The appearance of the man confirms my suspicion. A body, angular and ill-shaped, scarred with cicatrized wounds, and bent with age; a face seamed with the traces of evil passion; eyes deep sunken in their sockets, and sparkling like coals of fire—an aspect more fiend-like than human!

All this agrees with the descriptions I have had of the Red-Hand chief. Assuredly it is he. Our enemies, then, are the Arapahoes—their leader the dreaded *Red-Hand*.

"Heaven have mercy upon us! These men will have none!"

Such was the ejaculation that escaped my lips, on recognizing, or believing that I recognized, the foe that was before us.

The Red-Hand is seen to direct. He is evidently leader of the band. All seem obedient to his orders; all move with military promptness at his word or nod. Beyond doubt it is the Red-Hand and his followers, who for crimes and cold-blooded atrocities are noted as he. A dreaded band, long known to the traders of Santa Fe—to the *ciboleros* from the Taos Valley—to the trappers of the Arkansas and Platte.

We are not the first party of white men besieged by these barbarous robbers; and if it be our fate to fall, we shall not be their first victims. Many a brave "mountain-man" has already fallen a victim to their fiendish grasp. Scarcely a trapper who cannot tell of some comrade who has been slain by Red-Hand and his "Arapahoes."

The council of the chiefs continues for some time. Some *ruse* is being devised and debated among them. With palpitating hearts we await the issue. I have made known my suspicions as to who is our enemy, and cautioned my comrades to be on their guard. I have told them that, if my conjecture prove true, we need look for no mercy.

The talk is at an end. Red-Hand is about to address us.

Riding two lengths in front of his followers, the savage chief makes halt. His shield is held conspicuously upward—its convexity toward us—not for any purpose of security, but evidently that we may see its device and know the bearer. Red-Hand is conscious of the terror inspired by his name.

In his other hand he carries an object better calculated than the shield to beget fearful emotions. Poised on the point of his long spear, and held high aloft, are the scalps recently taken. There are six of them in the bunch—easily told by the different hues of the hair, and all easily identified as those of white men. They are the scalps of the slain teamsters and others who had vainly attempted to defend the captured wagon.

We view them with singular emotions—mine perhaps more singular than any. I endeavor to identify some of those ghastly trophies. I am but too satisfied at failing.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN ILL-TIMED SHOT.

"*Hablo Castellano*!" cries the savage chieftain, in broken Spanish.

I am not surprised at being addressed in this language by a prairie Indian. Many of them speak Spanish, or its North Mexican *patois*. They have opportunities of learning it from the New Mexican traders, but better—from their captives!

"*Si caballero!* I speak Spanish. What wishes the warrior with the red hand upon his shield?"

"The pale-face is a stranger in this country, else he would not ask such a question. What wishes the Red-Hand? Ha! ha! ha! The scalps of the white men—their scalps and lives—that is the will of the Arapaho chief!"

The speech is delivered in a tone of exultation, and accompanied by a scornful laugh. The savage is proud of his barbarous and bloodthirsty character—he glories in the terror of his name.

With such a monster, it seems idle to hold parley. In the end it will be only to fight, and if defeated, to die. But the drowning man cannot restrain himself from catching even at a straw.

"Arapaho! we are not your enemies! Why should you desire to take our lives? We are peaceful travelers passing through your country, and have no wish to quarrel with our red brothers."

"Red brothers! Ha, ha, ha! Tongue of a ser-

pent and heart of a hare! The proud Arapaho is not your brother; he disclaims kindred with a pale-face. Red-Hand has no brothers among the whites: all alike are his enemies. Behold their scalps upon his shield! Ugh! See the fresh trophies upon his spear! Count them! There are six! There will be ten. Before the sun goes down the scalps of the four squaws skulking on the mound will hang from the spears of the Arapahoes!"

I could not contradict the declaration: it was too fearfully probable. I made no reply.

"Dogs!" fiercely vociferated the savage, "come down and deliver up your arms!"

"An' our scalps too, I s'pose," muttered the Yankee. "Neo, certainly not, at your price. I don't sell my notions so dirt cheap as that comes to. 'Twouldn't pay nohow. Lookee yeer, old red gloves!" continued he, in a louder voice, and raising his head above the rampart, "this heer o' mine air vailable, do ee see? It air a rare color an' a putty color. It 'ud look jest the thing on thet shield o' yours; but 'tain't there yet, not by a long chalk; an' I kalklate ef ye want the skin o' my head ye'll have to trot up an' take it."

"Ugh!" ejaculated the Indian, with an impatient gesture. "The yellow squaw is not worth the words of a chief. His scalp is not for the shield of a warrior. It will be given to the dogs of our tribe. It will be thrown to the jackals of the prairie."

"Ain't partickler about what 'ee do wi' t—thet is, after ye've got it. Don't ye wish ee may get it, eh?"

"Wagh!" exclaimed the savage, with another impatient gesticulation. "The Red-Hand is tired talking. One word more. Listen to it, chief of the pale-faces! Come down and deliver up your fire-weapons! The Red-Hand will be merciful: he will spare your lives. If you resist, he will torture you with fire. The knives of his warriors will hew the living flesh from your bones. You shall die a hundred deaths; and the Great Spirit of the Arapahoes will smile at the sacrifice!"

"And what if we do not resist?"

"Your lives shall be spared. The Red-Hand declares it on the faith of a warrior."

"Faith o' a warrior! Faith o' a cut-throat! He only wants to come round us, capt'ing, an' git our scalps 'thout fightin' for 'em—thet's what the red varming wants to be at—sure as shootin'."

"Why should the Red-Hand spare our lives?" I inquired, taken by surprise at any offer of life coming from such a quarter. "Has he not just said that all white men are his enemies?"

"True. But white men may become his friends. He wants white men for his allies. He has a purpose."

"Will the Red-Hand declare his purpose?"

"Freely. His people have taken many fire-weapons. See! they are yonder in the hands of his braves, who know not how to use them. Our enemies, the Utahs, have been taught by the white hunters; and the ranks of the Arapaho warriors are thinned by their deadly bullets. If the pale-faced chief and his three followers will consent to dwell with the band of the Red-Hand and teach his warriors the great medicine of the fire-weapon, their lives shall be spared. The Red-Hand will honor the young soldier chief and the White Eagle of the forest."

"Soldier chief! White Eagle of the forest! How can he have known—"

"If you resist," continued he, interrupting my reflections, "the Red Hand will keep his word. You have no chance of escape. You are but four, and the Arapaho warriors are numerous as the trees of the Big Timber. If one of them fall by your fire-weapon he shall be revenged. The Red-Hand repeats what he has said: the knives of his braves will hew the living flesh from your bones. You shall die a hundred deaths, and the Great Spirit of the Arapahoes will smile at the sacrifice!"

"Be St. Patrick, capt'ing!" cried O'Tigg, who, not understanding Spanish, was ignorant of what had been said, "that ugly owld Indywan wants a bit ov cowld lid through him. In troth, I b'lave the musket might raich him. She belonged to Sargent Johnson, an' was considered the longest raich gun about the fort. What iv I throy her carry on the rid-skin? Say the word, your honor, an' here goes!"

So astounded was I at the last words of the Arapaho chief that I paid no heed to what the Irishman was saying. I had turned toward Wingrove—not for an explanation, for the young hunter, also ignorant of the language in which the Indian spoke, was unaware of the allusion that had been made to him.

I had commenced translating the speech, but before three words had escaped my lips the loud bang of a musket drowned every other sound, and the cloud of sulphurous smoke covering the whole platform hindered us from seeing one another.

It needed no explanation. The Irishman had taken my silence for consent: he had fired! From the thick of the smoke came his exulting shout:

"Hooray! he's down! Be me sowl, he's down! I knew the owld musket 'ud raich him! Hooray!"

The report reverberated from the rocks—mingling its echoes with the wild vengeful cries that came pealing up from the plain.

In an instant the smoke was wafted aside, and the painted warriors were once more visible.

The Red-Hand was erect upon his feet, standing by the side of his horse, and still holding his spear and his shield. The horse was down—stretched along the turf, and struggling in the throes of death!

"Be gorrah, cyapt'n! wasn't that a splendid shot?"

"A shot that may cost us our scalps," said I; for I saw that there was no longer any chance of a pacific arrangement—even upon the condition of our making sharpshooters of every red-skin in the tribe.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the wild laugh of the Arapaho. "Vengeance on the pale-face traitors! vengeance!"

And shaking his clinched fist above his head, the savage chief retired among his warriors.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ATTEMPT TO STAMPEDE.

WE made an attempt to open the interrupted parley, but it was in vain.

Whatever amicable design the Red-Hand might have conceived was now changed to a feeling of the

most deadly hostility. There was no more "talk" to be drawn from him—not a word.

In the midst of his warriors he stood scowling and silent. Neither did any of the chiefs deign to reply. The common braves made answers to our overtures, but only by the insult of a peculiar gesture.

Any hopes we might have conceived of a pacific termination to the encounter died within us as we noted the behavior of the band. Whether the Indian was in earnest in the proposal he had made, or whether it was a scheme to get our scalps without fighting for them, we could not tell at the time. There was an air of probability that he was honest about the matter; but, on the other hand, his notorious character for hostility to the white race contradicted this probability. I had heard, moreover, that this same chief was in the habit of adopting such stratagems to get white men into his power.

We had no time to speculate upon the point, nor yet upon that which puzzled us far more—how he had arrived at the knowledge of who we were.

What could he have known of the "White Eagle of the forest," or the "young soldier chief?"

So far as I myself was concerned, the title might have been explained. My uniform—I still wore—might have been espied upon the prairies. The Indians are quick at catching an appellation and communicating it to one another. But the figurative sobriquet of the young hunter? That was more specific. The Red-Hand could not have used it accidentally. Impossible. It bespoke a knowledge of us and our affairs that appeared mysterious and inexplicable. It did not fail to recall to our memory the apparition that had astonished Wingrove in the morning. There was no opportunity to discuss the question. We had only time for the most vague conjectures before the savages began to fire at us, discharging in rapid succession the guns which they had loaded.

We soon perceived that we had little to fear from this sort of attack. Unless by some stray bullet, there was not much danger of their hitting us. Their clumsy *maneuve* of the fire-weapon was evident enough. It added to the probability that the chief had been in earnest about our giving instructions to his warriors. Still was there some degree of danger. The guns they had got hold of were large ones, most of them old muskets of heavy caliber that cast their ounces of lead to a long distance. We heard their bullets pattering against the rocks, and one or two of them had passed whistling over our heads. It was just possible to get hit, and, to avoid such an accident, we crouched behind our parapet as closely as if we had been screening ourselves from the most expert marksmen.

For a long time we did not return their fire. O'Tigg was desirous of trying another shot with his piece, but I forbade it. Warned by what they had witnessed, the Indians had retired beyond even the range of the sergeant's fusil.

Two parties of savages now separated from the main body, and, taking opposite directions, go sweeping at full gallop round the butte. We divine their object. They have discovered the position of our animals; their intention is to stampede them.

We perceive the importance of preventing this. If we can but keep our animals out of the hands of the savages until darkness come down, then may there be some prospect of our escaping by flight. True, it is only a faint hope. There are many contingencies by which the design may be defeated, but there are also circumstances to favor it, and to yield without a struggle would only be to deliver ourselves into the hands of an unquitting foe. The last words uttered by the Arapaho chief have warned us that death will be preferable to captivity.

It was of the utmost importance to prevent our animals from being swept off, and to this end were our energies now directed. Three of us faced toward them, leaving the fourth to watch the movements of the enemy on the other side of the butte.

Once more the wild cry rings among the rocks, as the red horsemen gallop round, rattling their shields and waving their weapons high in the air.

These demonstrations are made to affright our animals and cause them to break from their fastenings. They have not the desired effect.

The mules prance and hiny; the horses neigh and bound over the grass; but the long boughs bend without breaking, and, acting as elastic springs, give full play to the affrighted creatures.

The first skurry is over, and we are gratified to see the four quadrupeds still grouped around the tree, and fast as ever to its branches. The stampede has proved a failure.

Another swoop of the wild horsemen ends with like result, and then another. And now closer and closer they come—galloping in all directions, crossing and meeting, and wheeling and circling, with shrill screams and violent gesticulations. As they pass near, they shelter themselves behind the bodies of their horses. An arm over the withers, a leg above the croup, are all of the riders we can see. It is useless to fire at these. The horses we might tumble over at pleasure, but the men offer no point to aim at. At intervals a red face gleams through the tossing locks of the mane, but ere we can take sight upon it, it is jerked away. For a considerable time this play is kept up, the Indians all the time yelling as if engaged in some terrible conflict.

As to ourselves, we are too wary to waste our shots upon the horses, and we reserve them in the hope of being able to draw a bead on some rider more reckless than the rest.

The opportunity soon offers.

Two of the savages exhibit a determination to succeed in snatching away the horses. Knife in hand, they career around, evidently with the design of cutting the bridles and lazoos. Cheered on by the shouts of their comrades, they grow less careful of their skins, and at length make a dash toward the group under the tree. When almost within head-reach of the fastenings by which the mules are held, one of the latter slews suddenly round and sends her heels in a well-directed fling against the head of the foremost horse! The steed instantly wheels, and the other coming behind follows the same movement, exposing both the riders to our aim. They make an effort to throw themselves to the other side of their animals, but the opportunity is lost.

Two of us fire at the same instant, and as the smoke clears away the red robbers are seen sprawling upon the plain. Our shots have proved fatal.

Before we can reload the struggles of the fallen horsemen have ended, and both lie motionless upon the grass.

Warned by the fate of their comrades, the Indians, although still continuing their noisy demonstrations, now kept well out of the range of our rifles. There appeared to be no others in the band desirous of achieving fame at such a risk of life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A RAMPART ON WHEELS.

For a time, our hearts throbbed more lightly; the pressure of apprehension was removed. We fancied the savages had either not yet become fully aware of the advantage of storming our position, or that the certainty of losing some of their number had intimidated them from making the attempt. They had abandoned their design, whatever it was; and intended waiting for night—the favorite fighting-time of the Indian. This was just what we desired; and were congratulating ourselves that the prospect had changed in our favor.

Our joy was short-lived; the enemy showed no sign of repose. Clustered upon the plain, they still kept to their horses. By this, we knew that some other movement was intended. The chiefs were again in the center of the crowd: the Red-Hand conspicuous. He was heard haranguing his warriors, though we could not guess the purport of his speech. His gestures told of fierce rage—his glances, now and then directed toward us, betokened a spirit of implacable vengeance.

At the conclusion of his speech, he waved his hand in the direction of the wagon. The gesture appeared to be the accompaniment of a command. It was promptly and instantly obeyed.

A dozen horsemen dashed out from the group, and galloped off. Their course was straight up the valley—toward the scene of their late strife. Those who had remained upon the ground dismounted, and were seen giving their horses to the grass.

This might have led us to anticipate a suspension of hostilities; but it did not. The attitude of our enemies was not that of purposed repose. On the contrary, they came together afoot; and engaged in what appeared to be an eager consultation.

We watched the party who had ridden off. As anticipated, the wagon proved to be the object of their excursion. Having reached it, they halt; and, dismounting, become grouped around it. It is impossible for some time to tell what they are doing. Even the glass does not reveal the nature of their movements. There are others besides those who rode up; and the white tilt appears in the midst of a dark cluster of men and horses.

Their errand at length becomes obvious. The crowd is seen to scatter. Horses appear harnessed to the tongue—the wheels are in motion—the vehicle is turning round upon the plain. We see that some half-dozen horses are hitched on, with men seated upon their backs as teamsters! They make a wheel and head down the valley in the direction of the butte. They are seen urging the animals into a rapid pace. The wagon, no longer loaded, leaps lightly over the smooth sward. The horses are spurred into a gallop; and amidst the shouts of the savage drivers, drag the huge vehicle after them with the rough rapidity of a mountain howitzer. In a few minutes it advances to the ground occupied by the dismounted band, who surround it upon its arrival.

We upon the summit have a full view of all. We recognize the well-known Troy wagon—with its red wheels, blue body, and ample canvas roof. The lettering, "Troy, New York," is legible on the tilt—a strange sight in the midst of its present possessors! What can be their object with the wagon? Their actions leaves us not long in doubt.

The horses are unharnessed and led aside. Half-a-dozen savages are seen crouching under the axles, and laying hold of the spokes. As many more stand behind—screened from our sight by the tilt-cloth, the body, and boxing. The pole projects in the direction of the mound!

Their object is now too painfully apparent. Without thinking of the analogy of the Trojan horse, we see that this monster of a modern Troy is about to be employed for a similar purpose. Yes—shielded by the thick planking of its bed—by its head and hind boards—by its canvas covering, and other cloths which they have cunningly spread along its sides, the savages may approach the mound in perfect safety. Such is their design. With dismay we perceive it. We can do naught either to retard or hinder its execution. Those under the vehicle can "speak" the wheels forward, without in the least exposing their bodies to our aim. Even their hands and arms are not visible; buffalo-ropes and blankets hang over, draping the wheels from our view. Those behind are equally well screened; and can propel the huge machine without risk of danger.

We note all these circumstances with feelings of keen apprehension. We adopt no means to hinder the movement; we can think of none, since none is possible. We are paralyzed by a sense of our utter helplessness.

We are allowed but little time to reflect upon it. Amidst the shouts of the savages, we heard the creaking of the wheels; we behold the mass in motion!

Onward it comes toward the mound—advancing with apparently spontaneous motion, as if it were some living monster—some horrid mammoth—approaching to destroy and devour us!

Risking the straggling shots, we looked over. The wagon had reached the base of the butte, its tongue was forced up among the trees, its body stood side by side with the granite prisms. The storming party no longer required it as a shield; they would be sufficiently sheltered by the great boulders, and to these they now betook themselves, passing from one to the other, until they had completely surrounded the butte. We observed this movement, but could not prevent it. We saw the Indians fitting from rock to rock, like red specters, and with the rapidity of lightning flashes. In vain we attempted to take aim; before a barrel could be brought to bear upon them they were out of sight. We ourselves, galled by the leaden hail, were forced to withdraw behind our ramparts.

Ha! what means that blue column slowly curling upward? It is smoke! See! Another and another—a dozen of them! From all sides they shoot upward, encircling the mound! Hark to those sounds!

the swish of burning grass—the crackle of kindling sticks. They are making fires around us! The columns are at first filmy, but soon grow thicker and more dense. They spread out and join each other; they become attracted toward the rocky mass; they fall against its sides, and wreathing upward, wrap its summit in their ramifications. The platform is enveloped in the cloud! We see the savages upon the plain—dimly, as if through a crape. Those with the guns in their hands still continue to fire; the others are dismounting. The latter abandon their horses, and appear to be advancing on foot. Their forms through the magnifying mist loom spectral and gigantic! They are visible only for a moment. The smoke rolls its thick volume around the summit, and shrouds them from our sight. We no longer see our enemy or the earth. The sky is obscured, even the rock on which we stand is no longer visible, nor one of us to the other.

Throughout all continues the firing from the plain, the bullets hurtle around our heads, and the clamor of our foemen reaches our ears with fierce thrilling import. We hear the crackling of fagots, and the spurring, hissing noise of many fires; but perceive no blaze, only the thick smoke rising in continuous waves, and every moment growing denser around us. We can bear it no longer; we are half-suffocated. Any form of death before this! Is it too late to reach our horses? Doubtless, they are already snatched away? No matter; we cannot remain where we are. In five minutes we must yield to the fearful asphyxia.

"No, never! let us die as we had determined, with arms in our hands!" Voices husky and hoarse make answer in the affirmative.

We spring to our feet, and come together—so that we can touch each other. We grasp our guns, and get ready our knives and pistols. We make to the edge of the rock, and, sliding down, assure ourselves of the path. We grope our way downward, guided by the granite walls on each side. We go not with caution, but in the very recklessness of a desperate need. We are met by the masses of smoke still rolling upward. Further down, we feel the hot caloric as we come nearer to the crackling fires. We heed them not, but rush madly forward—till we have cleared both the cloud and the flames, and stand upon the level plain!

It is but escaping from the fires of hell to rush into the midst of its demons. On all sides they surround us with poised spears and brandished clubs.

Amidst their wild yells, we scarcely hear the crackling of our guns and pistols; and those who fall to our shots are soon lost to our sight, behind the bodies of others who crowd forward, to encompass us. For a short while we keep together and fight, back to back, facing our foes. But we are soon separated; and each struggles with a dozen assailants around him!

The struggle was not protracted. So far as I was concerned, it ended, almost on the instant of my being separated from my comrades. A blow from behind, as of a club striking me upon the skull, deprived me of consciousness; leaving me only the one last thought—that it was death!

CHAPTER XL.

A CAPTIVE ON A CRUCIFIX.

AM I dead? Surely it was death, or an oblivion that equaled it? But no—I live! I am conscious that I live. Light is falling upon my eyes—thought is returning to my soul! Am I upon earth? or is it another world in which I awake? It is a bright world—with a sky of blue, and a sun of gold; but are they the sky and sun of the earth? Both may belong to a future world? I can see no earth—neither fields, nor trees, nor rocks, no water—naught but the blue canopy and the golden orb. Where is the earth? It should be under and around me, but I cannot see it. Neither around nor beneath can I look—only upward—and forward—only upon the sun and the sky! What hinders me from turning? Is it that I sleep and dream? Is the incubus of a horrid nightmare upon me? Am I, like Prometheus, chained to a rock face upward?

No—not thus; I feel that I am standing—erect as if nailed against a wall! If I am not dreaming, I am certainly in an upright attitude. I feel my limbs beneath me; while my arms appear to be stretched out to their full extent, and held as in the grasp of some invisible hand!

My head, too, is fixed; I can neither turn nor move it. A chord traverses across my cheeks. There is something between my teeth. A piece of wood it appears to be? It gags me, and half stifles my breathing! Am I in human hands? or are they fiends who are thus clutching me?

And where am I in this stringent attitude? I am conscious that I am a captive and bound—a captive to Indians—to Arapahoes. Memory helps me to this knowledge; and furthermore, that I should be, if I have not been carried elsewhere, in the valley of the Huerfano—by the Orphan Butte.

I hear shouts that appear to be signals—words of command in the fierce guttural of the Arapaho. Other sounds seem nearer. I distinguish the voices of two men in conversation. They are Indian voices. As I listen they grow more distinct. The speakers are approaching me—the voices reach me, as if rising out of the ground beneath my feet! They draw nigher and nigher. They are close to where I stand—so close that I can feel them breathing upon my body—but still I see them not. Their heads are below the line of my vision. I feel a band—knuckles pressing against my throat; the cold blade of a knife is laid along my cheek; its steel point glistens under my eyes. I shudder with a horrid thought. I mistake the purpose. I hear the "wheel" that announces the cutting of a tight-drawn cord. The thong slackens, and drops off from my cheeks. My head is free; but the piece of wood between my teeth—it remains still gagging me firmly. I cannot get rid of that.

I can now look below, and around me. I am on the butte—upon its summit. I am close to the edge of the platform, and command a full view of the valley below. A painted Arapaho is standing on each side of me. One is a common warrior, with naught to distinguish him from his fellows. The other is a chief. Even without the insignia of his band, the tall gaunt form and lupine visage are

easily identified. They are those of Red-Hand the truculent chieftain of the Arapahoes.

Now for the first time do I perceive that I am naked. From the waist upward, there is not a rag upon me—arms, breast, and body all bare.

This does not surprise me. It is natural that the robbers should have stripped me—that they should at least have taken my coat, whose yellow buttons are bright gold in the eyes of the Indian. But I am now to learn that for another, and very different, purpose have they thus bereft me of my garments. Now also do I perceive the *fashion* in which I am confined. I am erect upon my feet, with arms stretched out to their full fathom. My limbs are lashed to an upright post; and, with the same thong, are my arms tied to a transverse beam. *I am bound upon a cross!*

In an exulting tone, the savage chief broke silence.

"*Bueno!*" cried he, as soon as he saw my eyes were upon him—"bueno, bueno! The pale-face still lives! the heart of the Red-Hand is glad of it—ha, ha, ha! Give him to drink of the fire-water of Taos! Let him be strong! Fill him with life, that death may be all the more bitter to him!"

These orders were delivered to his follower, who, in obedience to them, removed the gag; and, holding to my lips a calabash filled with Taos whisky, poured a quantity of the liquor down my throat.

The beverage produced the effect which the savage chief appeared to desire.

Scarcely had I swallowed the fiery spirit when my strength and senses were restored to their full vigor—but only to make me feel more keenly the situation in which I stood—to comprehend more acutely the appalling prospect that was before me.

This was the design in resuscitating me. No other purpose had the cruel savage. Had I entertained any doubt as to the motive, his preliminary speech would have enlightened me; but it was made still clearer by that which followed.

"Dog of a pale-face!" cried he, brandishing a long Spanish knife before my eyes; "you shall see how the Red-Hand can revenge himself upon the enemies of his race. The slayer of Panthers, and the White Eagle shall die a hundred deaths. They have mocked the forest maiden, who has followed them from afar. Her vengeance shall be satisfied; and the Red-Hand will have his joy—ha, ha, ha!"

Uttering a peal of demoniac laughter, the Indian held the point of the knife close to my forehead—as if about to drive the blade into my eyes! It was but a feint to produce terror—a spectacle which the monster was said to enjoy.

Wingrove was still alive; the wretch Su-wa-nee must be near?

"*Curajo!*" again yelled the savage. "What promised you the Red-Hand? To cut the living flesh from your bones? But no—that would be merciful. The Arapahoes have contrived a sweeter vengeance—one that will appease the spirits of our slain warriors. We shall combine sport with the sacrifice of the pale-faced dogs—ha, ha, ha!"

After another fiendish cachinnation, far more horrible to hear than his words of menace, the monster continued:

"Dog! you refused to instruct the Arapaho in the skill of the fire-weapon; but you shall furnish them with at least one lesson before you die—ha, ha! You shall soon experience the pleasant death we have prepared for you! Ugh!"

"Haste!" he continued, addressing himself to his follower; "prepare him for the sacrifice! Our warriors are impatient for the sport. The blood of our brothers is calling for vengeance. This in white, with a red spot in the center—the rest of his body in black."

These mysterious directions were accompanied by a corresponding gesture. With the point of his knife, the savage traced a circle upon my breast—just as if he had been drawing it on the bark of a tree. The scratch was light, though here and there it drew blood. At the words "red spot in the center," as if to make the direction more emphatic, he punctured the spot with his knife till the blood flowed freely. Had he driven the blade to its hilt, I could not have flinched: I was fixed firmly as the post to which they had bound me. I could not speak a word—either to question his intent, or reply to his menace. The gag was still between my teeth, and I was necessarily silent. It mattered little about my remaining silent. Had my tongue been free, it would have been idle to use it. In the wolf's visage there was no trace of clemency: every feature bespoke the obduracy of unrelenting cruelty. I knew that he would only have mocked any appeal I might have made. It was just as well that I had no opportunity of making it.

After giving some further directions to his follower—and once more repeating his savage menace, in the same exulting tone—he passed behind me; and I lost sight of him. But I could tell by the noise that reached me at intervals, that he had gone down from the rock, and was returning to his warriors under the plain.

It was the first time since my face-fastenings had been cut loose, that I had a thought of looking in that direction. During all the while that the Red-Hand stood by me, I had been in constant dread of instant death—or of some equally fearful issue. The gleaming blade had never been out of my eyes for two seconds at a time; for in the gesticulations that accompanied his speeches, the steel had played an important part, and I knew not the moment, it might please the ferocious savage to put an end to my life.

Now that he was gone, and I found a respite from his torturing menace, my eyes turned mechanically to the plain.

I there beheld a spectacle, that under other circumstances might have filled me with horror. Not so then. The agony of my thoughts was already too keen to be further quickened.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SAVAGE ARTIST.

AN ensanguined skull was the first object that caught my eye. The dead man was easily identified. The body—short, plump, and rotund—could be no other than that of the unfortunate Irishman. His jacket had been stripped off; but some tattered remnants of sky-blue, still clinging to his legs, aided me in identifying him.

Poor fellow! The lure of Californian metal had

proved an ill star for him. His golden dream was at an end. He was lying along the sward, upon his side, half doubled up. I could not see his face. His hands were over it, with palms spread out—as if shading his eyes from the sun! It was a position of ordinary repose; and one might have fancied him asleep. But the gory crown, and red mottling upon the shirt—seemingly still wet—forbade the supposition. He slept; but it was the sleep of death!

My eyes wandered in search of the others. There were fires burning. They were out upon the plain, some three hundred yards from the base of the butte.

Not far from the fires, a group fixed my attention. It consisted of three figures—all in attitudes as different as it was possible to place them in.

He who lay along the ground, upon his back, was the young hunter Wingrove. He still wore his fringed buckskin shirt and leggings; and by these I recognized him. He was at too great distance for his features to be distinguished. He appeared to be bound hand and foot—with his ankles lashed together, and his wrists tied behind his back. He was thus lying upon his arms, in an irksome position; but the attitude showed that he was alive.

Some half-dozen paces from him was a second form, difficult to be recognized as that of a human being, though it was one. It was the body of Jephthah Bigelow. Its very oddness of shape enabled me to identify it—odder from the attitude in which I now beheld it. It was lying flat along the grass, face downward, the long ape-like legs and arms stretched out to their full extent—both as to length and width—and radiating from the thin trunk, like spokes from the nave of a wheel! Viewing it from my elevated position, this attitude appeared all the more ludicrous, though it was easy to perceive that it was not voluntary. The numerous pegs standing up from the sward, and the cords attached to them, and leading to the arms and limbs, showed that the spread-eagle position was a constrained one. That it was Sure-shot, I had no doubt. The spare locks of gray-colored hair were playing about in the breeze; and some remnants of bottle-green still clung around his limbs. But without these, the spider-like frame was too characteristic to be mistaken. I was glad to see those yellowish tufts. They told that the wearer still lived, as was also made manifest by the fact of his being bound. A dead body would not have merited such particular treatment.

It was the third figure of this group that most strongly claimed my attention. I saw that it was not that of a warrior, though quite as tall as many upon the plain. But the contour of the form was different, as also the fashion of the garments that draped it. It was the figure of a woman! Had I not been guided in my conjectures by a certain foreknowledge, by the allusions that had occurred in the speeches of Red-Hand, I should never have dreamt of identifying that form. Forewarned by these, the apparition was not unexpected. The woman was Su-wa-nee! She was standing erect by the prostrate form of the young hunter, her head slightly bent, and her face turned toward him. An occasional motion of her arm showed that she was speaking to him. The gesture seemed to indicate a threat! Was it possible that in that dread hour she was reviling him? I was at too great a distance, either to hear her words, or note the expression upon her face. Only by the dumb show of her gesticulations, could I tell that a scene was passing between them.

A glance around the plain enabled me to note some other changes that had recently taken place. The horses of the Indians were now picketed upon the grass, and browsing peacefully, as if the clangor of strife had never sounded in their ears. I could see my own Arab a little apart, with Wingrove's horse and the mules, all in charge of a horse guard, who stood sentry near them. The wagon was still by the base of the mound. The cedars along its sides were yet unburnt! I thought that the flames had consumed them, but no. The object of their fires had been to blind us with their smoke—thus to drive us from our position, and facilitate our capture.

I was not permitted to make these observations without interruption. The savage who had stood by me had a duty to perform; and during all this time he was busy in its performance. A singular and inexplicable operation it at first appeared to me. His initiatory act was to blacken my body from the waist upward, including my face, throat, and arms. The substance used appeared to be a paste of charcoal, which he rubbed rudely over my skin. A circle upon my breast—that traced out by the blade of the chief—was left clear; but as soon as the black ground had been laid on, a new substance was exhibited, of snow-white color, resembling chalk or gypsum. With this, after the blood had been carefully dried off, the circular space was thickly coated over, until a white disk, about as large as a dining-plate, showed conspicuously on my breast! A red spot in the center of this was necessary to complete the *escutcheon*, but the painter appeared at a loss for the color, and paused to reflect.

Only a moment did he remain at fault. He was an ingenious artist; and his ingenuity soon furnished him with an idea.

Drawing his knife, and sticking the point of it some half-inch deep into the fleshy part of my thigh, he obtained the required "carmine;" and, after dipping his finger in the blood, and giving it a dab in the center of the white circle, he stood for a short time contemplating his work.

A grim smile announced that he was satisfied with his effort in making a human target; and, uttering a final grunt, the swarthy Apelles leaped down from the platform, and disappeared from my sight.

A horrid suspicion had already taken possession of my soul; but I was not left long to speculate upon the purpose for which I had been thus bedaubed; the suspicion gave place to certainty.

Upon the plain directly in front of me, and at less than a hundred yards' distance from the butte, the warriors were collecting in groups. The Red-Hand with his under-chiefs had already arrived there; and the other Indians were forsaking the fires, and hurrying up to the spot.

They had left their lances apart, standing upright on the plain, with their shields, bows, and

quivers leaning against them, or suspended from their shafts. The only weapons taken along with them to the common rendezvous were the muskets: With these they were now occupying themselves—apparently preparing them for use.

I saw them mark out a line upon the grass, by stretching a lazo between two upright pegs. I saw them wiping, loading, and priming their pieces—in short, going through all the preliminary maneuvers, observed by marksmen preparing for a trial of skill. Then burst on me in all its broad reality the dread horror for which I was reserved—then did I comprehend the design of that white circle with its center of red; the savages were about to hold a shooting-match—*my own bosom was to be their target!*

CHAPTER XLII.

A PITILESS PASTIME.

Yes; to hold a shooting-match was undoubtedly the design of my captors, and equally clear was it that my breast was to be their mark. This explained my position upon the summit of the mound, as well as my attitude upon the cross. I was bound to the latter, in order that my person might be held erect, spread, and conspicuous. I could not comfort myself with any doubt as to their intention. Every movement I saw confirmed it, and the question was finally set at rest by Red-Hand possessing himself of one of the loaded muskets, and making ready to fire.

Stepping a pace or two in front of the line of his warriors, he raised the piece to his shoulder, and pointed it toward me.

It is vain to attempt describing the horror I endured at that moment.

Utterly unable to move, I gazed upon the glistening barrel, with its dark tube, that threatened to send forth the leaden messenger of death. I have stood before the pistol of the duelist. It is not a pleasant position to be in, under any conditions of quarrel. Still it is perfect happiness compared with that I then held. In the former case there are certain circumstances that favor the chances of safety. You know that you are *en profile* to your antagonist, thus lessening the danger of being hit. Judging by yourself, you feel assured that the aim taken will be quick and unsteady, and the shot a random one. You are conscious of possessing the capability of motion; that, whether you may feel inclined to give way to it or not, you still have a certain discretion of avoiding the deadly missile; that, by superior skill or quickness, you may anticipate your antagonist and hinder his bullet from being sent. There are other circumstances of a moral nature to sustain you in a trial of this kind—pride, angry passion, the fear of social contempt; and, stronger than all—perhaps most frequent of all—the jealousy of rival love. From none of all these could I derive support, as I stood before the raised musket of the Arapaho. There was no advantage—either moral or physical—in my favor. I was broad front to the danger, without the slightest capacity of dodging it, while there was nothing to excite the nerves of the marksman, or render his aim unsteady. On the contrary, he was sighting me as coolly as if about to fire at a piece of painted plank.

It may have been but a minute that the savage occupied himself in adjusting his aim; but to me it appeared ten. In such a situation I may have believed the seconds to be minutes; they seemed so. In reality, the time must have been considerable. The drops of sweat that had started from my brow were chasing each other over my cheeks, and trickling down upon my breast.

So prolonged was the suspense, I began to fancy that the Arapaho was designedly dallying with his aim, for the purpose of sporting with my fears. He may have had such motive for procrastination. I could have believed it. Distant though he was, I could mark his fiendish smile, as he repeatedly dropped the piece from his shoulder, and then returned it to the level.

That he meant more than mere menace, however, was proved in the end.

Having satisfied himself with several idle feints, I saw him make demonstration as if setting himself more determinedly to the work. This time he was certainly in earnest. His cheek lay steadily along the stock; his arms appeared more rigid; his finger was pressing on the trigger; the moment had come!

The flash from the pan—the red stream poured forth from the muzzle—the hiss of the bullet, were all simultaneous. The report came afterward; but, before it had reached my ears, I knew that I was untouched. The lead had already whizzed past, at a distance—as I could judge by the sound—of several feet from my body.

I heard a scratching behind me, and the instant after a swarthy face was thrust before my eyes. It was that of the artist who had painted me for the part I was playing. I had been under the impression that he had gone down to the plain, but I now perceived my error. He had remained near me, concealing his body behind the rock. I saw that he was now enacting a different *role*—that of marker for the marksmen.

Running his eye over my body, and perceiving that I was nowhere hit, he telegraphed the intelligence to his comrades upon the plain; and then glided back to his covert.

I was relieved from the terrible anxiety; but only for a short moment—a mere interval of about a dozen seconds' duration.

The Red-Hand, after firing, had resigned his place; but this was instantly occupied by one of his sub-chiefs, who, armed with another musket, in turn stepped up to the line.

Again I saw the gleaming barrel brought to the level, with its dark tube pointed upon my body. This marksman was more expeditious; but for all that, it was to me a time of racking torture. Again did the drops bead out upon my brow, and chase one another down my cheeks. Again had I to undergo all the agony of death itself and, as before, without dying, or even losing a drop of my blood. As before, I beheld the puff of smoke, the flash, the blaze of fire projected from the muzzle; but ere the crack reached me, I heard the thud of the bullet as it flattened against the granite on which I stood.

This time the marker did not mount up to the platform. He had seen the splinters shivered from

the rock, and without further inquiry, for the second time, telegraphed a miss.

A third candidate appeared upon the stand, and my fears returned, as acute as ever. This fellow caused me to suffer nearly a dozen deaths. Either was his gun without a flint, or his powder damp; since after snapping nearly a dozen times, the piece still refused to go off. Had it been designed to give me a new horror, the thing could not have been better planned, for each time that the savage essayed to fire, I had to undergo the agony of a fresh apprehension.

The scene ended by another gun being placed in his hands that did go off; but with no advantage to the clumsy marksman, for his bullet, like that of the Red-Hand, whistled past, far wide of the mark.

A fourth now took the ground. This was a tall, swarthy warrior, one of the tallest of the tribe, and without the insignia of a chief. The cool and deliberate manner in which he went about his work caused me to anticipate in him a better shot, and my apprehensions were heightened to a degree of painful intensity. I felt my whole frame shiver as his gun blazed forth, and for a time I believed myself hit. The cheer of his companions upon the plain announced the belief in the success of the shot; but he upon the summit soon undeceived them, just as I became myself reassured. The bullet had struck the wood-work of my crucifix—one of the cross-pieces to which my arms were attached. It was the shock of the timber that had deceived me into the belief that I had been struck.

A fifth marksman followed, and then another and another, until more than a dozen had tried their hands. The guns were now all emptied, but this caused only a temporary cessation in the cruel sport. They were soon reloaded, and new candidates stepped forward to make trial of their skill.

I had by this time discovered that they were not practicing for mere sport. It was a game, and bets were laid upon it.

Apart upon the plain the stakes were placed, consisting of saddles, robes, weapons and the plunder of the emigrant wagon. Horses also were picketed near—surplus animals—that were betted against one another, whether in many separate wagers, or all forming a grand "pool," I could not determine. My own scalp—I was uncertain whether I still wore it—was no doubt the chief object of the contest. It was the "cup" to be given to him who should place his bullet in that white circle upon my breast and nearest the red spot in the center!

The guns being once more reloaded, the firing recommenced. I saw that only one shot was allowed to each, and this only to those who had entered a stake. The condition gave me an opportunity of experiencing my apprehensions in different degrees; since, according to the apparent adroitness or clumsiness of the marksman, my fears of being hit were greater or less. Strange to say, before a dozen shots had been fired, I no longer wished them to miss! The dread ordeal, so often repeated, was too terrible to be borne. I was sustained by no hope of ultimate escape. I knew that the fiends would continue firing till some one of them should finish me by a fatal shot, and I cared not how soon it should be sent. Nay, I even desired that it should come quickly. Death was preferable to the agony I was enduring.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A HUNDRED DEATHS.

For a full hour was the pitiless pastime continued, during which at least fifty shots had been fired at my person.

The truculent chieftain had threatened me with a hundred deaths. He was fulfilling his threat to the letter; for, notwithstanding the unskillful practice, I felt on the eve of each discharge a certain creeping of the flesh and curdling of the blood, as if that moment was to be my last. If I had not yet died a hundred times, for at least so many had I felt all the sensations that should precede actual death. In truth, over a hundred times, for although but fifty shots had been fired, twice as often had the old guns snapped or flashed in the pan, and each of these was preceded by its especial pang.

I had not escaped altogether unscathed. I had been hit in two or three places—in my arms and limbs. Blood was running down my legs and creeping over my feet. I could feel it warm and wet as it trickled between my toes. The wounds could not be severe, since I scarcely felt them. Perhaps only the crease of a bullet? A scratch would be sufficient to cause the effusion of the blood, copious though it appeared to be; and I felt certain that no bone had yet been broken, that no vital part of my body had been touched.

After about an hour had been spent by the savages in their fiendish sport, the firing became suddenly suspended. I could not tell why, and sought for an explanation by watching the movements of the marksmen.

The chiefs had turned face to face, and were again engaged in some earnest deliberation. The subject of their talk was made known by their gesticulations. They were pointing toward Sure-shot, who still lay, as I have described, flat upon his face.

Wingrove was no longer there; nor yet Su-wanee! Where could they have gone? I had seen both but the moment before! Had she unbound, and rescued him? Was it about them that the savages were in consultation? No; the result proved not. It was the deserter who was the object of their attention—as was soon made manifest by their movements.

Half a dozen warriors were seen separating from the group and running up to the spot where Sure-shot lay. Stooping around him, they undid his fastenings; and then, having raised him to his feet, commenced dragging him toward the crowd of marksmen.

The terrified man made no resistance. It would have been idle. There was a brawny savage on each side, grasping him by the wrist; and three or four behind pushing him forward at a run. His long hair streaming loosely, strengthened the expression of despair that was depicted upon his countenance. No doubt he deemed it his last hour. Whither could they be dragging him? Whither but to death? This was my own belief—at first; but in a few minutes I had reason to change it.

For a short while, Sure-shot was encircled by the dusky forms, and I saw him not—or only the crown of his head—conspicuous by its yellow hue among

the darker *chevelures* of the Indians. What were they doing to him? I could not guess; but they appeared to be offering him no further violence.

After a time, the group scattered from around him, and the ex-rifleman was again uncovered to my view.

With some surprise, I perceived that the expression of his countenance had undergone a total change. It was no longer that of terror—much less of despair. On the contrary, there was a certain air of confidence visible both in his look and manner—as if something had been said, or done to him, that had given him satisfaction! I was further surprised at perceiving that he had a gun in his hands—his own rifle—and that he was in the act of loading the piece!

My surprise changed to indignation as I saw him step forward to the line, and stand facing me—evidently with the intention to fire!

Cowardly traitor! he has accepted life upon some base condition. Jeph Bigelow! Sure-shot! whom I thought true as steel! I would not have believed it. Such was the reflection, to which my gag prevented me from giving utterance.

In reality, I felt astonished at the behavior of the old ranger. I believed him a better man; but the dread of death is a powerful test to apply to the human soul; and hard must be the conditions of life when, under such circumstances, they are refused. Sure-shot had succumbed to the temptation.

Such was my belief, as I saw him raise his piece, and stand confronting me—in an attitude that too plainly bespoke his intention.

Another surprise awaited me—another stimulus to my indignation. Instead of looking ashamed of his work, and cowering under my glance, he appeared eager and determined to execute the dastardly design. There was even an expression of fierceness, ill becoming his countenance habitually meek. Under other circumstances, it would have been ludicrous enough.

"Bravado," thought I, "assumed, no doubt, to give satisfaction to his new allies?"

I had not recovered from the confusion of my surprise, when his voice fell upon my ear—uttered in a tone of anger, and accompanied with corresponding gestures. But the words that reached me explained all. On hearing them, I no longer suspected the loyalty of my old comrade. The angry expression was assumed; but the counterfeit had a design, far different from that which I had attributed to it. It was Sure-shot himself—still tricky as true.

"Capt'ing!" cried he, speaking quickly, and raising his gun with a gesture of menace, "pay 'tention to whet I'm 'bout to say. Look savagerous at me, an' make these yer vermin b'lieve you an' me's que'lling. Fo'most tell me, ef they've krippled ye 'bout the legs? I know ye can't speak; but shet yer eyes, an' thet says 'No.'"

I was for the moment puzzled, by the matter as well as manner of his speech, which in no way corresponded. In an instant, however, I perceived that he had some design; and I hastened to obey his hurried instructions. As to the first, I needed to make no alteration in my demeanor. Under the belief that he was disloyal, I had been regarding him with a glance sufficiently scowling. I preserved the expression—at the same time closing my eyes, as a negative answer to his query. Although I believed myself to be hit somewhere about the legs, I felt confident that I was not crippled.

"So fur good!" continued he, still speaking loudly and angrily. "Neow! slew yer right elbow down a leetle, an' gi' me a better chance at thet eer strip o' hide. I kinder guess as heow I kin cut the thing. It 'peers to be all o' one piece, an' 'll peel off yer body like a rope o' rushes. Ef I cut it, theer 'll be a chance for ye. Theer's only one o' the vermin ahint the mound. Yeer hoss air theer; make for the anymal—mount 'im, an' put off like a streak o' greased lightning! Neow!"

As he finished speaking, he stepped nearer to the line, and placed himself in an attitude to fire.

I now fully comprehended his design. I saw, as he said, that the cord which bound me to the crucifix was all of one piece—a thin thong of raw hide—lapped not very tightly around my arms, legs and body. If cut through at any point, it could easily be detached; and, true enough, my horse must be behind the butte, for I could not see him in front. By a quick rush I might succeed in reaching him, before the Indians could intercept me. If so, then indeed might there be a chance for escaping!

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SHARP SHOT.

SLENDER as appeared the prospect of my being freed from my fastenings, by the method proposed, I was not without some faith in Sure-shot being able to cut the thong. His skill in the use of the rifle was notorious even among good marksmen—and his aim believed to be unerring. I had known him to bring down with his bullet a bird upon the wing; and had heard him declare that it was not by the eye but by the mind that he did it. In other words, he meant that his skill was not mechanical, but that he was guided in the act by some mental operation, which he himself but imperfectly understood. I could believe this the more readily, since Sure-shot was not the only marksman I had known possessed of this peculiar power. A something inexplicable, which may be classed with the mysterious phenomena of clairvoyance and "horse-whispering."

With such belief in his skill, therefore, I was not without some hope that he might succeed in his design; and, to give him the chance he desired, I made a violent effort, and wrenched my arm downward. It was, to all appearance, a demonstration of my wrath, at what the pseudo-renegade had been saying to me; and it seemed to be thus interpreted by most of the savages who stood around him. The words of Sure-shot, spoken in English, were of course unintelligible to them; but, notwithstanding the inappropriate gestures which he had made use of, the suspicions of one were aroused. This was Red-Hand himself.

"What says he of the yellow scalp-lock to the captive?" inquired the chief, in Spanish. "Let him take heed, or he too shall become a shooting-mark for the Arapaho warriors!"

Sure-shot's reply was characteristic. It was also in broken Spanish, which the ranger had picked up during our campaign on the Rio Grande. Translated, it ran thus:

"I'm only telling him how I'm about to get square with him. *Carraambo!* great chief! when I was a soldier in the army, yon fellow was my *capitano*, and gave me a flogging. Believe me, chief! I'm right glad of this opportunity to have revenge on him. That's what I have been saying to him."

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, apparently satisfied with the explanation.

"Neow, capt'ing!" angrily shouted the rifleman, once more raising his piece to the level, "look 'e out! Don't be skeert about my hittin' o' ye! The whang lies well ageen the bit o' timber. The ball's a big 'un. I recking I kin bark it anyheow. Heer's to try!"

A tall, yellow-haired man standing with a rifle to his shoulder, his sallow cheek resting against the stock, the barrel apparently aligned upon my body, the quick detonation of a percussion-cap, a stream of red fire and smoke from the muzzle; a shock, followed by the quivering of the timbers to which I was tied, were perceptions and sensations of almost simultaneous occurrence. Twisting my head, and turning my eyes almost out of their sockets, I was able to note the effect of the shot. The thong had been hit, just at the point where it doubled over the edge of the wood. It was cut more than half through! By raising my elbow to its original position, and using it as a lever, I could tear apart the crushed fibers. I saw this; but in the anticipation of a visit from the marker, I prudently preserved my attitude of immobility. In a moment after, the grinning savage came gliding in front of me; and, perceiving the track of the bullet, pointed it out to those upon the plain. I was in a feverish state of suspense lest he might suspect design; but was relieved on seeing him step aside, while the shuffling, grating noise from behind admonished me that he was once more letting himself down over the edge of the platform.

The crowd had already closed around Sure-shot, who appeared to be expostulating with the chief, as if offering some explanation of his failure. I did not wait to witness the *denouement*.

Raising my elbow, and giving my arm a quick jerk, I heard the thong snapping asunder; and saw the broken ends spring out from their folds. Another wrench set my right arm free; and then, clutching the loosened coils, I unwound them with as much rapidity as if I had been freeing myself from the embrace of a serpent! Not one of the Indians saw what I was about till after I had undone my fastenings. Their eyes had been turned upon Sure-shot—with whom they appeared to be engaged in some angry altercation. It was only after I had sprung to one side, and stood clear of the crucifix, that I heard their ejaculations of astonishment, followed by a wild, continuous yelling.

I stayed not to note what they were doing. I merely glanced toward them as I turned away, and perceived that they were still fixed to their places, as if petrified by surprise. The moments were precious; and, bounding across the platform, I leaped down upon the opposite side.

There was a little shelf about six feet below the summit. I found it occupied by the indigenous artist. He was seated upon the edge, with his legs hanging over. His back was toward me; and he was only apprised of what had transpired by seeing me as I sprang to his side. He had already heard the yells from the other side, and was about to get to his feet at the moment I dropped down behind him. He was too late for the accomplishment of his purpose. Rushing forward, I planted my foot against his shoulder, and giving his body a violent impulsion, projected it clear over the edge. I saw it striking upon the angular prisms, and bounding from block to block, till it sunk out of sight amidst the tortuous branches of the cedars. I ran down the sloping path, taking many yards at a step.

Not far off was my horse, with that of Wingrove, and the mules. They formed a little group, but no longer under charge of a guard; for the latter had just left them, and was running forward to intercept me.

I saw that he had a weapon in his hand. It was a gun. He was pointing it upon me as he ran, endeavoring to take aim before firing. I heeded not the threatening attitude, but rushed straight toward him. I could not go round him, since he was between me and the horses. We both ran, as if to meet one another. When less than five paces separated us, the Indian stopped, sighted me, and pulled trigger.

His gun snapped. Before he could lower the piece, I had clutched the barrel, and with a desperate effort, wrenched the weapon from his grasp. I made a feint to strike him over the head. He threw up his arms to ward off the blow. Instead of using the gun as a club, I thrust him with the butt right under the ribs, and stretched him gasping upon the grass. He fell as if shot through the head.

Still holding on to the gun, which, by strange accident, proved to be my own rifle, I ran up to my horse. It was but the work of a moment to draw the picket-pin, gather up the lariat, and spring to his back. Once there, I felt that I was free!

The Indians came screaming round the butte, most of them afoot, and with no other weapons than the empty muskets.

A few, more prudent than their fellows, had made toward their arms and horses; but both being at a distance, they had not yet reached them, and the advantage was mine.

I was no longer hurried in my actions, not even afraid. I had no apprehension of being retaken. I felt confident that from my pursuers I could gallop away at will, and after taking time to adjust my lariat as a halter, I gave the head to my horse, and rode off.

My Arab needed no urging. Up the valley went he like a bird upon the wing. I could laugh to scorn the savage pack that came hallooing behind me.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CHASE AND THE SYNCOPE.

I MADE direct for the canyon whence issued the stream. Its gap grew wider as I approached it—though still appearing only a dark cleft between the rocks, like the entrance to some subterranean passage. I looked forward to it with satisfaction. Its shadowy chasm promised shelter and concealment.

When near the entrance of the gorge, I passed the

ground where the wagon had been captured. Part of its load—barrels and heavy boxes—were lying upon the sward. They were all broken, and rifled of their contents. The plunder had been carried to the butte. The dead bodies were still there—only those of the white men. I even halted to examine them. They were all stripped of their clothing, all scalped, and otherwise mutilated. The faces of all were blood-bedaubed. Under the red mask I could not have recognized them—even had they been the faces of old friends.

There were six of them. Divested of their garments, I could form no conjecture as to who or what they had been—whether teamsters or emigrants, gold-seekers or soldiers. The Mormon could not have been among them; the bodies were all too stout for his; while, on the other hand, there was none of them that could have been mistaken for that of the squatter, Holt. I turned away from the sickening sight, and continued my gallop.

My pursuers were a good mile behind me. The sun had already sunk over the crest of the cliffs, and I could just see the mounted savages through the darkening gloom, still following as fast as their horses could gallop.

In five minutes after I had entered the gorge. The twilight continued no longer; in the canyon it was night. I followed the stream upward, keeping along near the bank. Thick darkness was over and around me; but the gleam of the water and its rippling sound served to guide me on the path. I could not see any track—either of horses or wagons; but I knew they had passed over the ground. There was a narrow strip of bottom-land thickly timbered, and an opening through the trees indicated the road that the wagons must have taken. I trusted the trail to my horse. In addition to his keen instinct, he had been trained to tracking, and with his muzzle projected forward and downward, so that his lips almost touched the earth, he lifted the scent like a hound. We could only make progress at a quick walk; but I consoled myself with the thought that my pursuers could go no faster. Seeing how easily I had ridden away from them, they might determine to abandon the pursuit—returning to revenge themselves upon my fellow-captives.

I had groped my way some two or three miles up the gorge, when I became sensible of a singular faintness stealing over me. A chill crept through my frame—not like that produced by cold from without, but as if the blood was freezing in my veins! The feeling was accompanied by a sense of torpor and lassitude—like that experienced by one dropping to sleep in a snow-storm. I made an effort to rouse myself, thinking it was sleep that was oppressing me. It might well have been, since it was more than thirty hours since I had slept, and then only for a short while. It occurred to me that, by dismounting and walking for a distance, I might recover warmth and wakefulness. With this design I alighted from my horse. Once upon the ground, I discovered that I could not walk—that I could not even keep my feet! My limbs tottered under me as if I had been for months bedrid. Only by holding on to my horse could I stand erect. What could it mean? My Arab turned his head toward me, as if making the same inquiry. I endeavored to remount him, but could not. I was unable to clamber upon his back, and, after an unsuccessful effort, desisted, still supporting myself against his body. Had he moved away at the moment I should have fallen, and I must have fallen after my senses left me. In the last gleam of consciousness I remembered standing by the side of my horse. But I must have fallen: for when thought returned I found myself upon my back, stretched at full length along the grass.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TRACK OF THE MOCCASIN.

THE blue dawn of morning was glinting among the rocks when I awoke. On the crest of the cliff was a streak of amber-colored light, that betokened the rising of the sun and warned me that it was time to be stirring. I had no toilet to make—no breakfast to eat: nothing to do but mount my horse and move onward.

I continued up the lateral ravine—since there was no path leading out from it; and to return to the Huerfano, would have been to ride back into the teeth of danger.

I still felt faint. Though less than twenty-four hours since I had eaten, I hungered acutely.

Was there nothing I could eat?

I looked inquiringly around.

It was a scene of sterility and starvation. Not a symptom of life—scarcely a sign of vegetation! Rocks, bare and forbidding, formed two parallel facades grinning at each other across the gorge—their rugged features but little relieved by the mottling of dark junipers that clung from their clefts. There appeared neither root nor fruit that might be eaten. Only a chameleon could maintain existence in such a spot!

I had scarcely made this reflection when, as if to contradict it, the form of a noble animal became outlined before my eyes. Its color, size, and proportions were those of a stag of the red-deer species, but its spiral horns proclaimed it of a different genus. These enabled me to identify it as the rare mountain-ram—the magnificent *ommon* of the northern Andes. It was standing upon a salient point of the cliff, its form boldly projected against the purple sky, in an attitude fixed and statuesque. One might have fancied it placed there as an embellishment—a characteristic feature of that wild landscape. The scene would have been incomplete without it. From my point of observation it was five hundred yards distant. It would have been equally safe at five, since I had no means of destroying it. I might easily have crept within short range, since a grove of cottonwoods, just commencing where I had halted, extended up the bottom of the ravine. Under these I could have stalked to the base of the cliff on which the animal stood—a sort of angular promontory projecting into the gorge. This advantage only rendered the sight more tantalizing; my gun was empty, and I had no means of reloading it.

Was it certain the piece was empty? Why should the Indian have believed it to be loaded? Up to this moment I had not thought of examining it. I drew the ramrod and inverted it into the barrel. The head struck upon a soft substance. The screw stood four fingers above the muzzle: the gun was charged! There was no cap upon the nipple. There had been

none! This accounted for the piece having missed fire. In all likelihood I owed my life to the circumstance of the savage being ignorant of the percussion principle.

I was now indebted to another circumstance for a supply of caps. The locker near the heel of the stock had escaped the attention of the Indians. Its brass cover had passed for a thing of ornament. On springing it open the little caps of corrugated copper gleamed before my eyes—an abundance of them. I tapped the powder into the nipple, adjusted a cap, and dismounting, set forth upon the stalk.

The spreading tops of the cottonwoods concealed me, and crouching under them, I made my approaches as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit. It grew damper as I advanced, and presently I passed pools of water and patches of smooth mud, where water had recently lain. It was the bed of an intermittent stream—a hydrographic phenomenon of frequent occurrence in the central regions of North America. The presence of water accounted for that of the cottonwood trees—a sure indication of moisture in the soil.

The water was a welcome sight. I was suffering from thirst even more than from hunger, and notwithstanding the risk of losing my chance of a shot, I determined to stop and drink.

I was creeping forward to the edge of one of the ponds when a sight came under my eyes that astonished me, and to such a degree as to drive both thirst and hunger out of my thoughts—at least for the moment.

In the margin of sandy mud extending along the edge of the water appeared a line of tracks—the tracks of human feet! On crawling nearer I perceived that they were moccasin tracks, but of such tiny dimensions as to leave no doubt as to the sex of the individual who had made them. Clearly, they were the imprints of a woman's feet! A woman must have passed that way! An Indian woman of course!

This was my first reflection, and almost simultaneous with it arose another half-interrogative conjecture—was it Su-wa-nee? No. The foot was too small for that of the forest maiden. I had a remembrance of the dimensions of hers. The tracks before my eyes were not over eight inches in length, and could only have been made by a foot slender and of elegant shape. The imprint was perfect, and its clear outline denoted the light, elastic tread of youth. It was a young woman who had made those footmarks.

At first I saw no reason to doubt that the tracks were those of some Indian girl. Their size would not have contradicted the supposition. Among the aboriginal belles of America a little foot is the rule, a large one the exception. I had tracked many a pair much smaller than those, but never had I seen the footprints of an Indian with the toes turned out, and such was the peculiarity of those now before me.

This observation—which I did not make until after some time had elapsed—filled me with astonishment, and something more. It was suggestive of many and varied emotions. The girl or woman who had made these tracks could never have been strapped to an Indian cradle. She must be white!

CHAPTER XLVII.

A RIVAL STALKER.

It was not by any conjecture that I arrived at this conclusion. I was quite confident that the footprints were not those of a squaw—all inexplicable as was the contrary hypothesis. I observed that they were very recent—of less than an hour's age.

As I rose from regarding them a new sign appeared on the same bed of sand—the foot-marks of a wolf! No—I was deceived by resemblance. On nearer examination they were not wolf-tracks I saw, but those of a dog, and evidently a large one. These tracks were also fresh, like the woman's tracks—made doubtless at the same time. The dog had accompanied the woman, or rather had been following her, since a little further on, where both were in the same line, his track was uppermost.

There were two special reasons why this sign should astonish me: a white woman in such a place, and wearing moccasins! But for the style of the *chaussure*, I might have fancied that the tracks were those of some one who had strayed from the caravan. I might have connected them with *her*—ever uppermost in my thoughts. But—no. Small though they were, they were yet too large for those *mignon* feet, well remembered. After all, I might be mistaken? Some dusky maiden might have passed that way, followed by her dog? This hypothesis would have removed all mystery, had I yielded to it. I could not; it was contrary to my tracking experience. Even the dog was not Indian; the prints of his paws proclaimed him of a different race.

My perplexity did not prevent me from quenching my thirst. The pain was paramount; and after assuaging it, I turned by eyes one more toward the cliff. The wild ram had not stirred from his place. The noble animal was still standing upon the summit of the rock. He had not even changed his attitude. In all likelihood, he was acting as the sentinel of a flock, that was browsing behind him. The sun was falling fair upon his body, and deepened the fern-red color upon his flanks. I could note his full round eyes glistening under the golden beam. I was near enough to bring him down; and, should the rifle prove to have been properly loaded, I was likely to have for my breakfast the choicest viand of the mountain region of America. I had raised my piece, sighted the noble game, and was about to pull trigger, when, to my astonishment, the animal sprang off from the cliff; and, turning back downward, fell heavily into the gorge!

When I saw him pitching outward from the rock, I fancied he was making one of those singular summersets, frequently practiced by the *oris ommon* in descending the ledges of a cliff. But no. Had the descent been a voluntary one, he would have come down upon his huge elastic horns, instead of falling as he had done, with the dull sodden sound of a lifeless body.

I perceived that the bighorn had ceased to live; and the report of a gun—that rung through the gorge, and was still reverberating from the cliffs—told the cause of his death.

Some hunter, stalking on the other side, had taken the start of me!

White or red? Which fired the shot?

If an Indian, my head would be in as much danger of losing its skin as the sheep. If a white man, I might still hope for a breakfast of broiled mutton. Even a churl might be expected to share with a starving man; but it was not the quarter in which to encounter a Christian of that kidney.

From prudential considerations, I kept my place. Screened by the cottonwoods, I should have an opportunity of deciding the point, without my presence being suspected. If the hunter should prove to be an Indian, I could still retreat to my horse without being observed.

I had not long to wait.

I heard a noise, as of some one making way through the bushes. The moment after, a huge wolf-like animal rushed round the projecting angle of the cliff, and sprang upon the carcass of the bighorn.

At the same instant a voice reached my ears.

"Off there, Wolf! off, villain dog! Don't you see that the creature is killed—no thanks to you, sirrah?"

Good heavens! it was the voice of a woman!

While I was yet quivering under the surprise produced by the silvery tones, the speaker appeared before my eyes—a girl majestically beautiful. A face smooth-skinned, with a tinge of golden brown—cheeks of purplish-red—a nose slightly aquiline, with nostrils of spiral curve—eyes like those of the Egyptian antelope—a forehead white and high, above bounded by a band of shining black hair, and surmounted by a coronet of scarlet plumes—such was the head that I saw rising above the green frondage of the cottonwoods! The body was yet hidden behind the leaves; but the girl just then stepped from out the bushes, and her whole form was exhibited to my view—equally striking and picturesque. I need not say that it was of perfect shape—bust, body, and limbs all symmetrical. A face like that described could not belong to an ungainly form.

The costume of the girl corresponded to the cast of her features. About both there was that air of wild picturesqueness, which we observe in art paintings of the Gipsy, and sometimes in the Gipsy herself—for those sirens of the green lanes have not all disappeared; and, but that I saw the snowy cone of Pike's Peak rising over the crest of the cliff I might have fancied myself in the Sierra Asturias, with a beautiful *Gitan* standing before me. The soft fawn-skin *tilma*, with its gaudy brodering of beads and stained quills—the fringed skirt and buskined ankles—the striped Navajo blanket slung scarf-like over her shoulders—all presented a true Gipsy appearance. The plumed circlet upon the head was more typical of Transatlantic costume; and the rifle carried by a female hand was still another idiosyncrasy of America. It was from that rifle the report had proceeded, as also the bullet, that had laid low the bighorn! It was not a hunter then who had killed the game; but she who stood before me—a huntress—the WILD HUNTRESS.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE WILD HUNTRESS.

No longer was it from fear that I held back; but a hesitancy springing from surprise mingled with admiration. The sight of so much beauty—grand as unexpected—was enough to unnerve one, especially in such a place—and one to whose eye the female form had so long been a stranger. Su-wa-nee's I had seen only at a distance; and hers, to my sight, was no longer beautiful.

I hesitated to show myself—lest the sight of me should alarm this lovely apparition, and cause her to take flight. The thought was not unnatural—since the tri-colored pigments of black, red, and white were still upon my skin; and I must have presented the picture of a chimney-sweep with a dining-plate glued upon his breast.

In such a guise I knew that I must cut a ludicrous figure, and would have slipped back to the pool, and washed myself; but I dreaded to take my eyes from that beautiful vision, lest I might never look upon it again! In my absence, she would be gone? I feared even then, that on seeing me she might take flight; and I was too faint to follow her. For this reason, I stood silently gazing through my leafy covert, like one who watches the movements of some shy and beautiful bird.

Her voice again reached me, as she recommenced scolding the dog; even its chiding tones were sweet.

She had approached, and stooped for a moment over the bighorn, as if to satisfy herself that the animal was dead. Her canine companion did not appear to be quite sure of the fact; for he continued to spring repeatedly upon the carcass with open mouth, as if eager to devour it.

"Off, off!" cried she, threatening the dog with the butt of her rifle. "You wicked Wolf! what has got into you? Have I not told you that the thing is dead—what more do you want? Mind, sirrah!" continued she, shaking her finger significantly at the dog—"mind, my good fellow! you had no part in the killing of it; and if you spoil the skin, you shall have no share in the flesh. You hear me? Not a morsel!"

Wolf appeared to understand the hint and retired. Impelled by hunger, I accepted the cue:

"You will not refuse a morsel to one who is starving?"

"Aha! who speaks?" cried the huntress, turning round with a glance rather of inquiry than alarm. "Down, Wolf!" commanded she, as the dog bounded forward with a growl. "Down, you savage brute! Don't you hear that some one is starving? Ha! a negro! Poor devil! where can he have come from, I wonder?"

Only my head was visible—a thick bush in front of me concealing my body. The coat of char upon my face was deceiving her.

"No, not a negro," said I, stepping out and discovering my person—"not a negro, though I have been submitted to the treatment of one."

"Ho! white, red and black! Mercy on me, what a frightful harlequin! Ha, ha, ha!"

"My toilet appears to amuse you, fair huntress? I might apologize for it—since I can assure you it is not my own conception, nor is it to my taste any more than—"

"You are a white man, then?" said she interrupting me—at the same time stepping nearer to examine me.

"I was, yesterday," I replied, turning half round, to give her a sight of my shoulders, which the Indian

artist had left untouched. "To-day, I am as you see."

"Oh heavens!" she exclaimed, suddenly changing her manner, "this red? It is blood! You are wounded, sir? Where is your wound?"

"In several places I am wounded; but not dangerously. They are only scratches; I have no fear of them."

"Who gave you these wounds?"

"Indians. I have just escaped from them."

"Indians! What Indians?"

"Arapahoes."

"Arapahoes! Where did you encounter them?"

The question was put in a hurried manner, and in a tone that betrayed excitement.

"On the Huerfano," I replied—"by the Orphan butte. It was the band of a chief known as the Red-Hand."

"Ha! The Red-Hand on the Huerfano! Stranger, are you sure of this?"

The earnest voice in which the interrogatory was again put somewhat surprised me.

I answered by giving a brief and rapid detail of our capture, and subsequent treatment—without mentioning the names of my traveling companions, or stating the object of our expedition. Indeed, I was not allowed to enter into particulars. I was hurried on by interpellations from my listener—who, before I could finish the narrative of my escape, again interrupted me, exclaiming in an excited manner:

"Red-Hand in the valley of the Huerfano! news for Wa-ka-ra!"

After a pause she hastily inquired:

"How many warriors has the Red-Hand with him?"

"Nearly two hundred."

"Not more than two hundred?"

"No—rather less, I should say."

"It is well—You say you have a horse?"

"My horse is at hand."

"Bring him up, then, and come along with me."

"But my comrades? I must follow the train that I may be able to return and rescue them."

"You need not for such a purpose. There is one not far off who can aid you in that—better than the escort you speak of. If too late to save their lives, he may avenge their deaths for you. You say the caravan passed yesterday?"

"Yesterday about noon."

"You could not overtake it and return in time. The Red-Hand would be gone. Besides you cannot get from this place to the trail taken by the caravan, without going back by the canyon; and there you might meet those from whom you have escaped. You cannot cross that way; the ridge is impassable."

As she said this she pointed to the left, the direction which I had intended to take.

I could see through a break in the bluff a precipitous mountain spur running north and south, parallel with the ravine I had been threading. It certainly appeared impassable, trending along the sky like the escarpment of some gigantic fortress. If this was true, there would be but little chance of my overtaking the escort in time.

I had no longer a hope of being able to effect the rescue of my comrades. The delay, no doubt, would be fatal. In all likelihood, both Wingrove and Sure-shot had ere this been sacrificed to the vengeance of the Arapahoes, freshly excited by my escape. Only from a sense of duty did I propose returning—rather with the idea of being able to avenge their deaths.

What meant this mysterious maiden? Who possessed the power to rescue my comrades from two hundred savages—the most warlike upon the plains? Who was he that could aid me in avenging them?

"Follow me and you shall see!" replied the huntress, in answer to my interrogatory. "Your horse! your horse! Hasten, or we shall be too late. The Red-Hand in the valley of the Huerfano! Wa-ka-ra will rejoice at the news. Your horse! your horse!"

I hastened back for my Arab, and hurriedly led him up to the spot.

"A beautiful creature!" exclaimed she, on seeing the horse; "no wonder you were able to ride off from your captors. Mount!"

"And you?"

"I shall go afoot. But stay! time is precious. Can your steed carry us both?"

"Undoubtedly he can."

"Then it is better we should both ride. Half an hour is everything; and if the Red-Hand should escape—You mount first—be quick!"

It was not the time to be squeamish, even under the glance of the loveliest eyes. Taking the robe from my shoulders, I spread it over the back of my horse, and employing a piece of the lariat as a surcingle, I bound it fast. Into the improvised saddle I mounted, the girl, from a rock, leaping upon the group behind me.

"You, Wolf!" cried she, apostrophizing the dog, "you stay here by the game and guard it from the coyotes. Remember, rascal! not a mouthful till I return."

"Now, stranger," she continued, shifting closer to me, and clasping me round the waist, "I am ready. Give your steed to the road and spare him not, as you value the lives of your comrades. Up the ravine lies our way. Ho! onward!"

The brave horse needed no spur. He seemed to understand that speed was required of him; and, stretching at once into a gallop, carried us gayly up the gorge.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A QUEER CONVERSATION.

My captive comrades were uppermost in my mind. Her promise had given me hope that they might yet be rescued. How? and by whom? Whither were we going? and whose was the powerful hand from which help was to come? I would have asked, but our rapid movement precluded all chance of conversation. I could only form conjectures. These pointed to white men—to some rendezvous of trappers that might be near. I knew there were such. How else, in such a place, could her presence be accounted for. Even that would scarce explain an apparition so peculiar as that of this huntress maiden.

Other circumstances contradicted the idea that white men were to be my allies. There could be no band of trappers strong enough to attack the dark host of Red-Hand—at least with the chance of de-

stroying it. She knew the strength of the Arapahoes. I had told her their number, as I had myself estimated it—nearly two hundred warriors.

It was rare that a party of white hunters mustered above a dozen men. Moreover, she had mentioned a name—twice mentioned it—"Wa-ka-ra." No white was likely to bear such an appellation. The word was undoubtedly Indian—especially as the huntress had pronounced it.

I waited for an opportunity to interrogate her. It offered at length—where the path ran circuitously among loose rocks, and it was impossible to proceed at a rapid pace.

I was about initiating a dialogue, when I was forestalled in my intention.

"You are an officer in the army?" said my companion, half interrogatively.

"How should you have known that?" answered I in some surprise, perceiving that her speech was rather an assertion than a question.

"Oh! easily enough; your uniform tells me."

"My uniform?"

"Yes. Have you not still a portion of it left?" inquired she, with a striking simplicity. "I see a mark here where lace stripes have been. That denotes an officer, does it not? The Arapahoes have stripped them off, I suppose?"

"There was lace—true—you have guessed correctly. I have been in the army."

"And what was bringing you out here? On your way to the gold countries, I dare say?"

"No, indeed; not that."

"What, then, may I ask?"

"Only a foolish freak. It was a mere tour without much purpose. I intended soon to return to the States."

"Ah! you intend returning? But you say you were following the caravan—you and your three fellow-travelers? Why were you not with it? Would it not have been safer?"

I hesitated to make reply. My interrogator continued:

"It is not usual for so small a party to pass over the prairies alone. There is always danger from the Indians; sometimes from whites, too! Ah me! there are white savages—worse savages than red—far worse—far worse!"

These strange speeches, with the sigh that accompanied them, caused me to turn my head and steal a glance at the countenance of my companion. It was tinged with melancholy, or rather deeply impressed with it. She, too, suffering from the past? In this glance I again remarked what had already attracted my notice—a resemblance to Lillian Holt!

It was of the slightest, and so vague that I could not tell in what it lay. Certainly not in the features—which were signally unlike those of Lillian; and equally dissimilar was the complexion. Were I to place the resemblance, I should say that I saw it in the cast of the eye, and heard it in the voice. The similitude of tone was striking. Like Lillian's, it was a voice of that rich clarion sound with which beautiful women are gifted—those having the full round throat so proudly possessed by the damsels of Andalusia.

Of course, reflected I, the likeness must be accidental. There was no possibility of its being otherwise; and I had not a thought that it was so. I was simply reminded of looks and tones that needed not that to recall them. The souvenirs so excited hindered me from making an immediate reply.

"Your observations are somewhat singular," I remarked at length. "Surely you have not verified them by your own experience?"

"I have—yes, and too sadly ever to think them otherwise than just. I have had little reason to love those of my own color—that is, if I am to consider myself a white."

"But you are so, are you not?"

"Not altogether. I have Indian blood in my veins."

"Not much, I should fancy."

"Enough to give me Indian inclinations—and, I fear, also a dislike to those of my own complexion."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps less from instinct than experience. Ah! stranger, I have reason. Is it not enough that all have proved false—father, lover, husband?"

"Husband! You are married then?"

"No."

"You have been?"

"No."

"Why did you say husband?"

"A husband only in name. I have been married, but never a wife."

The speaker paused. I could feel her arm quivering around my waist. She was under the influence of some terrible emotion.

"Yours must be a strange story?" I remarked, with a view of inducing her to reveal it. "You have greatly excited my curiosity; but I know that I have no claim to your confidence."

"You may yet win it."

"Tell me how."

"You say you intend returning to the States. I may have a commission for you; and you shall then hear my story. It is not much. Only a simple maiden, whose lover has been faithless—her father untrue to his paternal trust—her husband a cheat, a perjured villain."

"Your relationships have been singularly unfortunate; but your words only mystify me the more. I should give much to know who you are, and what strange chance has led you hither."

"Not now—time presses. Your comrades, if still alive, are in peril. That is your affair; but mine is that the Red-Hand may not escape. If he do, there's one will grieve at it—one to whom I owe life and protection."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of the mortal enemy of Red-Hand and his Arapahoes—of Wa-ka-ra."

"Wa-ka-ra?"

"Head chief of the Utahs—you shall see him presently. Put your horse to his speed! We are close to the camp. Yonder are the smokes rising above the cliff! On, stranger—on!"

As directed, I once more urged my Arab into a gallop. It was not for long. After the horse had made about a hundred stretches, the canyon suddenly opened into a small but beautiful valley, treeless and turfed with grass.

The white cones, appearing in serried rows near

its upper end, were easily identified as an encampment of Indians.

"Behold!" exclaimed my companion, "the tents of the Utahs!"

CHAPTER L.

WA-KA-RA.

THE lodges were aligned in double row, with a wide avenue between them.

At its head stood one of superior dimensions—the wigwam of the chief.

They were all of conical shape; a circle of poles converging at their tops, and covered with skins of the buffalo, grained and bleached to the whiteness of wash-leather. A slit in the front of each tent formed the entrance, closed by a list of the hide that hung loosely over it. Near the top of each appeared a triangular piece of skin, projecting outward from the slope of the side, and braced, so as to resemble an inverted sail of the kind known as *lateen*. It was a wind-guard to aid the smoke in its ascent. On the outer surface of each tent was exhibited the biography of its owner—expressed in picture-writing. More especially were his deeds of prowess thus recorded—encounters with the cougar and grizzly bear—with Crows, Cheyennes, Pawnees, and Arapahoes—each under its suitable symbol. The great marquee of the chief was particularly distinguished with this kind of emblematical emblazonment—being literally covered with signs and figures, like the patterns upon a carpet.

No doubt, one skilled in the interpretation of these Transatlantic hieroglyphics might have read from that copious cipher many a tale of terrible interest.

In front of the tents stood tall spears, with shields of *parfleche* leaning against them; also long bows of *bois d'arc*, and shorter ones of horn—the horns of the mountain-ram. Skin-quivers filled with arrows hung suspended from the shafts; and I observed that, in almost every grouping of these weapons, there was a gun—a rifle.

This did not much astonish me. I knew that, to the Utah, the medicine weapon is no longer a mystery.

Here and there, hides freshly flayed were pegged out upon the grass, with squaws kneeling around them, engaged in the operation of graining. Girls, with water-tight baskets, poised upon the crown of the head, were coming from or going toward the stream. Men stood in groups, idly chatting, or squatted upon the turf, playing at games of chance. Boys were busy at their bow-practice; and still younger children rolled their naked bodies over the grass, hugging half-grown puppies—the companions of their infant play. Troops of dogs trotted among the tents; while a mixed herd of horses, mules, sheep, goats, and asses browsed the plain at a little distance from the camp. Such was the *coup d'œil* that presented itself to my gaze, as we rode up to the Utah encampment.

As might be expected, our arrival caused a change in the occupation of everybody.

The dicers leaped to their feet—the squaws discontinued their work, and flung their scrapers upon the skins.

"*Ti-ya!*" was the exclamation of astonishment that burst from hundreds of lips.

Children screamed, and ran hiding behind their dusky mothers; dogs growled and barked; horses neighed; mules binnied; asses brayed; while the sheep and goats joined their bleating to the universal chorus.

"On to the chief's tent!" counseled my companion, gliding to the ground, and preceding me on foot, "Yonder! the chief himself—Wa-ka-ra!"

An Indian of medium size and perfect form, habited in a tunic of embroidered buckskin, leggings of scarlet cloth, head-dress of colored plumes, with crest that swept backward and drooped down to his heels. A gayly-striped *serape*, suspended scarf-like over the left shoulder, with a sash of red China crape wound loosely around the waist, completed a costume more picturesque than savage. A face of noble type, with an eye strongly glancing, like that of an eagle; an expression of features in no way fierce, but, like the dress, more gentle than savage; a countenance, in repose mild—almost to meekness. Such saw I.

Had I known the man who stood before me, I might have remarked how little this latter expression corresponded with his real character.

I was face to face with the most noted war-chief of America, whose name, though new to me, was at that moment dreaded from Oregon to Arispe, from the banks of the Rio Bravo to the sierras of Alta California.

It was *Walker*—the war-chief of the Utahs—the friend of the celebrated trapper, whose name he had adopted; and which, by the modification of Utah orthoepy, had become *Wa-ka-ra*.

An odd individual—a very odd one—was standing beside the chief as I rode up.

He appeared to be a Mexican, to judge by his costume and the color of his skin. The former consisted of *jaqueta* and *calzoneros* of dark-colored velvet, surmounted by a broad-brimmed *sombrero* of black glaze; while the complexion, although swarthy, was several shades lighter than that of the Indian. He was a man of diminutive stature, and with a countenance of a serio-comical cast. An expression of this kind pervaded his whole person—features and figure included—and was heightened by the presence of a singular accouterment that hung suspended from his leathern waist-belt. It was a piece of timber some eighteen inches in length, and looking like the section of a boot-tree, or the half of a wooden milk-yoke. At the thick end was a concavity or socket, with straps, by which it was attached to the belt; and this singular apparatus, hanging down over his thigh, added to the grotesque appearance of its owner.

"The little Mexican had all the cut of a 'character,'" and he was one, as I afterward ascertained.

He was no other than the famous *Pedro Archilete*—or "Peg-leg," as his comrades called him—a trapper of Taos, and one of the most expert and fearless of that fearless fraternity.

The odd accouterment which had puzzled me was nothing more than an artificial leg! It was an implement, however, he only used upon occasions—whenever the natural one—the ankle of which had been damaged by some accident—gave out through the fatigue of a march. At other times he carried

the wooden leg, as I first saw it, suspended from his belt.

His presence in the Indian encampment was easily accounted for. He was in alliance with their chief: for the Utahs were at times *en paz* with the settlements of the Taos Valley; and the Spanish trappers and traders went freely among them. Peg-leg had been on a trapping expedition to the Parks; and having fallen in with the Utahs, had become the guest of Wa-ka-ra.

CHAPTER LI.

PEG-LEG.

"The huntress returned soon?" said the chief, interrogatively, as the girl glided up to him. "She brings strange game!" added he, with a smile. "Who is the young warrior with the white circle upon his breast? He is a pale-face. It is not the custom of our white brothers to adorn themselves in such fashion?"

"The painting is not his," replied the girl. "It has been done by the hands of his enemies—by red-men. The white circle was designed for a mark, at which many bullets have been fired. The red streaks you see are blood, that has streamed from wounds inflicted on the stranger's body! When Wa-ka-ra shall know who caused that blood to flow, he will hasten to avenge it."

"If it be the wish of the white huntress, Wa-ka-ra will avenge the blood—even though his own people may have spilled it. Speak, Ma-ra-nee! You say that red-men have done this—were they Utahs?"

"No; but the enemies of the Utahs." "The Utahs have enemies—on the north, south, east, and west they have foes. Whence comes the stranger? and who has been spilling his blood?"

"From the east—from the Arapahoes." "Ugh!" exclaimed the chief, with a start, his countenance suddenly becoming clouded with an angry expression. "Arapahoes! Where has the pale-face encountered the Arapahoes?"

"On the Huerfano." "Good; the white huntress brings news that will gladden the hearts of the Utah warriors! Arapahoes on the Huerfano! who has seen them there?"

The huntress replied by pointing to me. "He has been their captive," she added, "and has just escaped from them. He can guide Wa-ka-ra to their camp, where the Utah chief will find his deadliest enemy—Red-Hand."

At the mention of this name, the cloud that was gathering upon the brow of the Utah chief became darker by several shades, and the mild expression was no longer observable. In its place was a look of fierce resolve, blended with glances that spoke a savage joy. Some old and terrible resentment was rekindled by the name—with a hope, no doubt, of its being gratified?

The chief now entered upon a series of interrogatories directed to myself. He spoke English—thanks to his trapper associations: and it was in this language he had been conversing with the huntress. His inquiries were directed to such particulars as might put him in possession of the necessary knowledge for an attack upon the Arapahoes. As concisely as possible, I made known their position and numbers—with other circumstances calculated to aid in the design. The account I gave seemed to gratify him. As soon as our dialogue was ended, I had the satisfaction to hear him declare his intention of proceeding at once to the valley of the Huerfano! To me it was joyful news: my comrades might yet be rescued from the hands of the Arapahoes!

"Ma-ra-nee!" said he, again addressing himself to the huntress, "conduct the stranger to your tent! Give him food. And you, *Cajo!*" he continued, turning to the little Mexican, "you are skilled in medicine—look to his wounds! He can repose while we are preparing. Ho! sound the signal of assembly! Summon our braves to the war-dance!"

The last words were addressed to an Indian who was standing close behind him. Quickly succeeding the order, the notes of a bugle burst upon the air—strange sounds in an Indian camp!

But the white man's music was not the only sign of civilized life to be observed among the tents of the Utahs. The guns and pistols—the spurs, lances, and saddle—the shakos and helmets—all spoke of the spoiled *presidios* on the Mexican frontier; while fair-skinned *doncellas* of Spanish race were seen mingling with the copper-colored squaws—aiding them in their domestic duties—captives to all appearance contented with their captivity!

None of this was new to me. I had witnessed similar scenes in the land of the Comanche. They are of daily occurrence along the whole frontier of Spanish America: where the red-man constantly encroaches—reclaiming the country of his ancestors, wrestled from him three centuries ago by the cupidity of the *Conquistadores*.

The red-man no longer goes to war as a mere savage. He has disciplined his strength into a perfect strategy; and possesses a military system as complete as that of the most civilized nations. The Comanche cavalry charges in line, and can perform evolutions to the call of the bugle! So can the Utah, as I had evidence at that moment.

Before the trumpet-notes had ceased to reverberate from the rocks, five hundred warriors had secured their horses, and stood beside them armed and ready to mount. A regiment of regular dragoons could not have responded to "Boots and saddles" with greater expedition!

Peg-leg took possession of me.

"Senor Pintado!" said he, speaking in Spanish, and after having examined my wounds, "the best medicine for you will be your breakfast; and while your *compaisana* is preparing it, you can come with me, and have a little water thrown over you. This painting does not improve your looks; besides, if it get into your wounds, they will be all the more difficult to make a cure of. *Nos vamos!*"

The huntress had retired to a tent that stood near that of the chief, and a little to the rear of it. I followed the Mexican, who, in a hobbling gait, proceeded toward the stream.

The cold bath, assisted by some Taos brandy from the gourd *auge* of the trapper, soon restored my strength; and the hideous pigment, lathered with the bruised roots of the *palmilla*—the soap-plant of the New Mexicans, soon disappeared from my skin. A few slices of the *oregano* cactus applied to my wounds, placed them in a condition to heal with a

rapidity almost miraculous; for such is the curative power of this singular plant. My Mexican *medico* was yet more generous, and furnished me with a handsome Navajo blanket, which served as a complete covering for my shoulders.

"*Carram-o!*" exclaimed he, as he tendered the garment, "take it, *Americano!* You may be able to repay me when you have recovered your possible-sack from the Arapahoes. *Mira!*" he added, pointing toward the tents—"your breakfast is ready: yonder the *senorita* is calling you. Take heed, *hom-bre!* or her eyes may cause you a more dangerous wound than any of those you have received from the bullets of the Arapahoes. *Vaya!*"

I resisted an inclination to make inquiries: though the hint of the Taos trapper half-furnished me with an excuse.

My "countrywoman," he had called her. No doubt he knew more of her history; but I questioned him not. Remembering her promise, I had hopes that I might soon learn it from her own lips.

CHAPTER LII.

A BEAUTIFUL HOSTESS.

"*Aha, stranger!*" said she, as I approached the tent, "he has altered your appearance wonderfully. Oh! you are not so frightful now. Come in! Here is *palo*, and a little broiled goat's flesh. I am sorry I did not bring some of the wild sheep. It is most excellent; but in my haste I did not think of it. Bread I cannot give you; we never have it here."

"I have been accustomed to ruder fare than this," said I, accepting the proffered viands, and without further ceremony, seating myself to discuss them.

There was an interval of silence, during which I continued eating. Once or twice, my hostess went out, returning again to see if anything was wanted. The warlike preparations going on outside appeared greatly to interest her; and I thought she regarded them with impatience, or as if anxious about the event.

Who or what was the object of this solicitude? Wa-ka-ra? In what relationship stood she to the chief? A captive she could scarcely be; else would she not have been permitted to stray so far from the encampment? His wife? The separate tent, as also the style used by the Utah in addressing her, negated the idea. What then? I longed to hear the history of this wild huntress; but the opportunity had not yet arrived.

"*Ah!*" said she, returning once more within the tent, "I fear they will be too late. The red post is only just now erected; and the war-dance may last for an hour. It is a useless ceremony—only a superstition. The chief himself does not believe in it; but his braves will not go to battle without performing it. Hark! they are commencing the chant!"

I caught the low monotone of many voices, gradually rising and swelling into a prolonged chorus. At intervals, one was heard speaking in solo; as if proclaiming some distinguished deed, to incite the warriors to emulation. Then followed a clangor of yells, and loud whoops, breathing menace and revenge.

"It is the war-song that accompanies their dance," added she. "You may rest till it is finished. Then you must be ready; they will ride off as soon as the ceremony is over."

She flung herself on one of the buffalo-ropes that covered the floor of the tent; and half-seated, half reclining, appeared to reflect. The attitude displayed a feminine form of magnificent outlines; and with a face dazzlingly beautiful, this singular woman presented a picture something more than attractive.

"Wa-ka-ra must love her?" thought I.

As I made this reflection, I again observed the melancholy expression upon her countenance; and once more the resemblance to her of whom I was thinking! My interest in the beautiful huntress was every moment augmenting. I felt an indescribable yearning to hear the story of her misfortunes; for in no other light could I regard the situation in which I had found her.

"You have promised to tell me of yourself?" said I, reminding her of what she had said.

"I shall keep my promise, upon the condition, of which I have forewarned you."

"Name it then—if not impossible, I am ready to accept it."

"It is not impossible, though it may tax your generosity more than you expect. You have said that you intend returning to the States. Will you take me with you?"

A start must have betrayed my astonishment at the unexpected request.

"Willingly," I replied; "but now—I fear—it is impossible."

"Your journey is not ended? Is that what you mean?"

"Alas! I know not when or where it may end."

"That is strange! But you intend to go back some time? Till then let me be your traveling companion?"

The proposal left me for a moment without a word to say.

"Oh, do not refuse me!" continued she, in an appealing tone. "I will wait upon you; I will hunt for you—anything, but longer I cannot stay here. With all their kindness—and they have been kind, in their own rude fashion—I cannot remain. I long for the society of civilized beings. Oh, stranger! I cannot tell you how I long to see—"

She hesitated.

"Whom?" I asked, in expectation of hearing a name.

"A sister—a sweet, gentle sister, who loved me as her own life—whom I loved more than my life. Oh, not till we were parted knew I the strength of that love."

"How long since you have seen this sister?"

"Six months ago I left her—deceived by a villain, I left her. Six years it has seemed. Oh! I cannot endure this savage life. They honor me—they give me all the hospitality in their power—but I am not happy. Stranger! say you will relieve me from this terrible existence? Say you will take me with you?"

"I freely promise it, if it be your desire. But what of these? Will they—will he consent?"

"Who?"

"Wa-ka-ra."

"Yes—yes! He has said I may go, whenever an opportunity should offer. Brave chief! he has nobly kept his word to him who is now no more."

"To whom?"

"To him who saved my life—to him who saved me— Ah! see, the chief approaches! the war-song is ended. At another time I shall tell you all; but not now. We must haste, or the warriors will be gone."

"Surely you do not intend to accompany us?"

"The women follow at a distance to take care of the wounded. I go with them."

The voice of Wa-ka-ra, calling to me to join him and his warriors, put an end to a dialogue that had done but little to illustrate the story of the strange personage by my side. If possible, I was more mystified than ever. But it was not a time to be tempted by the lure of an idle curiosity, however interesting the theme.

The perilous situation of my old comrades came once more vividly before my mind. The thought recalled me to my duty, and hurrying from the presence of that beautiful being—whom I hoped soon to behold again—I leaped upon the back of my horse, and joined the Utah warriors, as they swept in full gallop from out the lines of their encampment.

CHAPTER LIII.

EFFECTING THE SURROUND.

THE ride was rough and rapid.

Notwithstanding the superiority of my steed, it was as much as I could do to keep pace with my new allies, whose horses, used to all sorts of ground, went gliding along the uneven paths, as if they had been graded roads.

Through tangled bushes they scrambled without stay, over sharp and slippery rocks—their unshod hoofs rendering them sure-footed as mountain sheep. Down the gorge lay our route, and paths, over which I had almost feared to walk my horse, were now passed in a quick continuous gallop.

We soon reached the scene of my encounter with the huntress. The dog still kept sentry over the game. Couchant by the body of the bighorn, he only growled as the cavalcade swept past. No one stopped to relieve him of his charge. On a war expedition the chase is universally neglected. Even its spoils are spurned. Hunger is supposed to beget prowess, as it sharpens the wits, and the savage fights best upon an empty stomach.

The hurried movements of the Indians—the eagerness each one exhibited to press forward—proved how earnest they were on this expedition. It was not my affair that was stimulating them to such speed. A tribal hostility of long standing—older than the warriors themselves—existed between Utah and Arapaho. Between the bands of Wa-ka-ra and Red Hand the hostile inheritance had increased until it had reached the maximum of the most deadly *vendetta*. This will account for the hot haste with which we hurried on—for the universal excitement that prevailed in the ranks of my Utah allies. They knew that they outnumbered their enemies. They already exulted in the anticipation of a grand coup.

For all that, they were not rushing recklessly into battle. The Utah chieftain was too skilled a soldier. I perceived that he was acting upon a preconceived plan, and his strategy was soon made known to me. It was that of the "surround."

The band was to break up into four divisions of nearly equal numerical strength. The first under Wa-ka-ra himself, was to go round by the bluffs; and, having worked its way into the lower canyon, would enter the plain from that direction. Should the Arapahoes attempt to retreat toward the Arkansas, this party could intercept them. A second division—also keeping above the bluffs—was to make to a point nearly opposite the butte; where, by a ravine known to the Indians, a descent could be made into the valley of the Huerfano. A third was to seek its station upon the opposite side—where a similar defile led down to the plain; while the remaining warriors were to move forward by the upper canyon, and halt at its mouth—until the other three parties were known to have reached their respective places.

At a signal agreed upon, all four divisions were to move forward at a rapid gallop, and close in upon the enemy. The first party was to give the cue, as it had the furthest to go; and, by the time it could reach its destination, the others would be ready. A smoke was to be the signal for charging forward.

The plan was well conceived; and if it should prove that the Arapahoes were still by the butte, a fight a *coutrance* might be looked for as the certain result. They would have no alternative but fight.

The execution of the movement was soon entered upon.

Near the place where I had passed the last hours of the night, a side ravine—whom, in the darkness I had not observed—sloped up out of the gorge. By canyons and deep defiles, the whole face of the country was cut up in this *bipinnate* fashion—every pass of it being well-known to the Utahs. Hence their confidence in being able to effect the surround of their enemies, who were less familiar with this region; and who must have been tempted thither by the passage of the train.

Up the lateral ravine rode Wa-ka-ra with his dusky warriors; while the second division, intended to take station on the bluff, defiled by the same track, but more slowly. The rest of us kept on down the gorge.

On reaching the main canyon, the party destined for the opposite bluff separated from the other, and proceeded circuitously by a branch ravine that opened to the upper plain.

The fourth and last division rode direct down the bank of the river—upon the path by which I had been pursued. This division was in charge of the second chief, and to it was I myself assigned—with Peg-leg, also a volunteer, as my immediate companion. The trapper had himself some old scores to settle with the Arapahoes, and appeared as eager for the fight as any Utah in the tribe.

Apprehensive of falling in with some straggling pursuers of the preceding night, we moved forward with caution. The sub-chief was an old warrior, whose scars and grizzled hair betokened experience of many a hostile encounter, and no doubt many a cunning stratagem. Scouts were sent in advance; and these, returning from time to time, signaled that the path was clear.

Advancing in this fashion, we at length reached the *embouchure* of the canyon, and halted within its gloomy shadow.

As yet not an Arapaho had been seen; but, on climbing to a ledge of rocks, I had the satisfaction to perceive that these brigands were still by the butte. I saw not them, but their horses—the *cavallada* being almost in the position in which I had left it! From this it was evident, that they had returned from the pursuit; had abandoned it altogether, and given their steeds to the grass. Only a few of the men were in sight—moving about among the fires that still burned upon the plain; but the strength of the *cavallada* told that the others were there—no doubt, concealed from our view by the interposed mass of the mound. I saw the wagon at its base—the white tilt conspicuous against the dark-green foliage of the cedars. But my eyes dwelt not upon this. In rapid glance, they were carried to the summit.

The crucifix was still there. I could trace its timbers—its upright and horizontal beams—though not distinctly. I knew what was rendering their outlines indistinct. There was a body upon the cross—the body of a man. It was that which interrupted the regularity of the lines. The timbers were between me and the body—for I viewed it from behind—and at such a distance, I could not have told who was the crucified man, even had he been facing me.

Wingrove or Sure-shot—one or the other. Of that much I was certain.

I could make out that the man was naked—just as I had been myself. I saw his white skin glistening along each side of the upright post.

While gazing upon it, I heard the report of a musket. Nearly at the same instant, a little blue-colored cloud was ascending into the air. It rose from behind the butte; and was easily recognizable as smoke produced by the discharge of a gun. The savages had returned to their cruel sport. Too clearly did I comprehend the signs of that fiendish exhibition.

After regarding the crucifix for awhile, I noted a circumstance that enabled me to decide which of my comrades was undergoing the terrible ordeal.

To a certainty, Sure-shot was the sufferer. The Red-Hand had fulfilled his threat, and my brave preserver was now promoted to my place.

I could tell it was Sure-shot by his height. I remembered that my own crown scarcely reached the top of the upright post. That of him now enduring the torture rose above it—by a head. Under the bright sunbeam, there was a sheen of yellow hair. That of Wingrove would have appeared dark. Beyond doubt, Sure-shot was the martyr now mounted upon that dread cross!

I viewed the spectacle with feelings not to be envied. My soul chafed at the restraint, as it burned with bitter indignation against these demons in human form. I should have rushed forward to stay the sacrifice, or, if too late, to satisfy the vengeance it called forth; but I was restrained by reflecting on the impotency of the act.

The prudent chief who commanded the Indians would not move till the smoke-signal should be given; and videttes had climbed far up on the cliff to watch for and announce it. It was not anticipated that we should have long to wait.

Our party had moved slowly down the defile, and the time consumed in our advance was considerable—almost enough to have enabled the others to get to their respective stations. This thought—along with my experience of the ball-practice of the Arapahoes—in some measure reconciled me to the delay.

If he upon the cross were still living his chances of escape were scarcely problematical. Another shot or two from such marksmen would be neither here nor there. If the unfortunate man were already dead, then was the delay of less consequence: we should still be in time to avenge him.

But he was not dead.

The evidence that he was living was before my eyes, though in the confusion of the moment I had not sooner perceived it.

Above the top of the post appeared the head, held stiffly upright. This proved that the body still lived. Had it been otherwise the head would have been drooping.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE HISTORY OF THE HUNTRESS.

I HAD just made these observations as the Mexican clambered up the rock and took stand by my side.

"*Hijo de Dios!*" exclaimed he, as his eyes fell upon the cross, "*la crucifixion!*" What a conception for savages! *Mira!*" he continued, as another white cloud puffed out from behind the sloping side of the mound and the report of a musket came booming up the valley, "*Santissima!* they are firing at the unfortunate!"

"Yes," said I, "they are playing with one of my comrades as they did yesterday with myself."

"Ah, *mio amigo!* that is an old game of the Arapahoes. They used to practice it with their arrows, and for mere sport. Now that they have taken to guns, I suppose they combine instruction with amusement, as the books say. *Carrambo!* what cruel brutes they are! They have no more humanity than a grizzly bear. God help the poor wretch that falls into their clutches! Their captive women they treat with a barbarity unknown among other tribes. Even beauty, that would soften a savage of any other sort, is not regarded by these brutal Arapahoes. Only think of it! They were about to treat in this very fashion the beautiful Americana—the only difference being that they had strapped her to a tree instead of a crucifix. *Carrambo!*"

"The beautiful Americana?"

"Yes—she who brought you to the camp."

"What! She in the hands of the Arapahoes?"

"*Sin duda.* It was from them she was taken."

"When, and where? How, and by whom?"

"*Hola! hombre!*—four questions at once! *Muy bien!* I can answer them, if you give me time. To the first, I should say about six months ago. To the second, near the Big Timbers, on the Arkansas. My reply to the third will require more words: and before giving it I shall answer the fourth by saying that the girl was taken from the Arapahoes by Don Jose!"

"Don Jose! Who is Don Jose?"

"Oh! perhaps you would know him by his American name—Oaquar."

"Walker, the celebrated trapper? Joe Walker?"

"The same, *amigo.* Oaquara, the Utahs pronounced it. As you perceive, their young chief is named so, and after him. The trapper and he were sworn friends—brothers—or more like father and son, since Don Jose was much the older."

"Were friends? Are they not so still?"

"*Valga me dios!* No. That is no longer possible. Don Jose has gone under—was rubbed out more than three months ago, and by these very Arapahoes! That is why your fair *compañera* is now with the Utahs. The old trapper left her to his namesake, Oaquara—under whose protection she has been ever since."

"He has been true to his trust? He has protected her?"

Under the influence of singular emotions did these questions escape me.

"*Seguramente, amigo!*" replied the Mexican, with an ingenuousness calculated to allay my unpleasant fancies, "the Utah chief is a noble fellow—*un hombre de bien.* Besides, he would have done anything for his friend, whose death greatly grieved him. That is just why you see him here in such haste. It was not to avenge your wrongs that they danced their war measure, but the death of Don Jose. All the same to you, however, since your *compañeros* are likely to have the advantage of it. As for the Americana," continued he, before I had time to make rejoinder, "*Virgen santissima!* such a maiden was never seen in these parts. Such a shot! Not a marksman in the mountains could match with her, except Don Jose himself, who taught her; and as for hunting—*la linia cazadora!* she can steal upon the gamelike a cougar. Ah! she can protect herself. She has done so. But for her spirit and rifle, the Red-Hand would have ruined her."

"But how? You have not told me—"

"True, *cavallero!* I have yet to answer number three. *Bueno!* As I said, it was near the Big Timbers where she got into the hands of the Arapahoes."

There was only a small band of the robbers, with Red Hand at their head. He wanted to play the brute with her. She kept him off with her rifle and a big dog you have seen. Red Hand became angry, and had her strapped to a tree, where the monsters threatened to shoot their arrows into her body. Whether they intended to kill her or only to terrify the poor girl is not known; but if the former was their design, they were hindered from putting it into execution. Just at that moment Don Jose came upon the ground with a party of trappers from the rendezvous on Cuerno Verde. They were strong enough to beat off the red-skinned ravishers and save the Americana. That is how she was taken from the Arapahoes."

"A brave deed! But how did she chance to be there? Since Bent's Fort was abandoned, there is no white settlement near the Big Timbers."

"Ah, señor, that is the strangest part of the whole story. It was told me by Don Jose himself, while we were *compañeros* on a trapping expedition, just after he had saved the girl. *Carrambo!* a strange tale!"

"Have you any objection to tell it to me? I feel a singular interest in this young girl."

"*Sin duda!* Of many a mountain man the same might be said, and many an Indian, too. Hum! *cavallero*, you would not be flesh and blood if you didn't."

"Not that, I assure you. My interest in her springs from a different source. I have other reasons for inquiring into her history."

"You shall have it, then, *cavallero!*—at least so much as I know of it myself, for it is reasonable to suppose that Don Jose did not tell me all he knew. This much: The *nina* was with a caravan that had come from one of your Western States. It was a caravan of Mormons. You have heard of the Mormons, I suppose—those *hereticos* who have made settlements here beyond?"

"I have."

"Well, one of these Mormons was the husband of the girl, or rather ought to have been, since they were married just at starting. It appears that the young woman was against the marriage—for she loved some one more to her choice—but her father had forced her to it; and some quarrel happening just at the time with the favorite lover, she had consented—from pique, *sin duda!*—to accept the Mormon."

"She did accept him?"

"Yes; but now comes the strange part of the story. All I have told you is but a common tale, and the like occurs every day in the year."

"Go on!"

"When she married the Mormon, she did not know he was a Mormon; and it appears that these *hereticos* have a name among your people worse than the very *Judios.* It was only after the caravan had got out into the plains that the girl made this discovery. Another circumstance equally unpleasant soon came to her knowledge, and that was that the man who pretended to be her husband was after all no husband—that he did not act to her as a husband should do—in short, that the marriage had been a sham, the ceremony having been performed by some Mormon brother, in the disguise of a *clerico!*"

"Was the girl's father aware of this deception?"

"Don Jose could not tell. He may have known that the man was a Mormon; but Don Jose was of opinion that the father himself was betrayed by the false marriage, though he was present at it and actually bestowed the bride!"

"Strange!"

"Perhaps, *cavallero*, the strangest is yet to come. For what purpose, do you suppose, was this deception practiced upon the poor girl?"

"I cannot guess. Go on."

"*Carrambo!* it was a hellish purpose; but you shall hear it. These Mormons have at their head a great chief priest—*una profeta*, as they call him. He is a polygamist—a perfect Turco—and keeps a harem of beautiful *ninas*, who pass under the name of 'spiritual wives.' It was only after the young Americana had got far out upon the plains—indeed, to the Big Timbers, where she escaped from him—that she found out the terrible fate for which her false husband had designed her. She learned it from the other women who accompanied the caravan, and who, base wretches that they were! rather envied her the honor by which she was to be distinguished! *Por Dios!* a terrible fate for a young creature innocent and virtuous like her!"

"Her fate? Quick—tell me! for what had the villain destined her?"

"*Virgen Santa!* for the harem of the Mormon prophet!"

"*Mira!*" exclaimed the Mexican, almost in the same breath—"Mira! the signal-smoke of Wa-kara! To horse! to horse! *muera a los Arapahoes!*"

It was not the signal that called from my lips a convulsive exclamation. It was wrung from my agony, ere the smoke had been descried. It was drowned amidst the shouts of the savage warriors, as they crowded forward out of the chasm. Leaping down from the ledge and flinging myself on the back of my horse, I mingled in the *melee.*

As we swept from the gorge I cast a glance behind. The sound of female voices caused me to look back. The Utah women, mounted on mules and horses, were coming down the canyon, with the white huntress at their head!

I wished a word with her; but it was too late. I dared neither pause nor go back. My Utah allies would have branded me as a coward—a traitor to my own cause!

I did not hesitate a moment; but, joining in the "Ugh-aloo," I dashed into the midst of the dusky host and galloped onward to the charge.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SURPRISE.

THE white cloud—a puff of powder-smoke—had scarcely scattered in the air when a dark mass appeared upon the plain, emerging from the sulphureous vapor.

It was a troop of horsemen—the warriors of Wa-kara.

On giving the signal, they had issued forth from the lower canyon, and were coming up the valley at a gallop. They were too distant for us to hear their charging cheer; but from right and left proceeded a double shout—a war-cry answering to our own; and the moment after, a stream of dusky forms was seen pouring down each bluff, through the sloping gorges that led to the plain.

We could hear the shout that announced the astonishment of the Arapahoes.

It was evident that they had been taken altogether by surprise; having no suspicion that an enemy was near—least of all the dreaded foes who were now rushing forward to surround them.

The red-men are rarely betrayed into a panic.

Accustomed from earliest youth to war, with all its wiles, they are always prepared for a *stampede.* It is the system they themselves follow, and are ever expecting to be practiced against them. They accept the chances of attack—no matter how sudden or unforeseen—with all the coolness of a contest premeditated and prearranged. Even terror does not always create confusion in their ranks—for there are no ranks—and in conflicts with their own race, combinations that result from drill and discipline are of little consequence. It is usually a fight hand to hand, and man to man—where individual prowess prevails, and where superior personal strength and dexterity conduct to conquest.

It is for this reason that the scalp-trophy is so highly prized; it is a proof that he who has taken it must have fought to obtain it. When "hair is raised" in a night attack—by the chance of an arrow or bullet—it is less esteemed. By the laws of Indian warfare the stratagem of assassination is permissible, and practiced without stint. But a *coup* of this kind is far less glorious, than to slay an enemy, in the open field, and under the broad glare of the sunlight. In conflicts by day strategy is of slight advantage, and superior numbers are dreaded.

It was the superior numbers of their Utah enemies that caused dismay in the ranks of the Arapahoes. Otherwise, they would not have regarded the mode of attack—whether their assailants advanced upon them in a single body, or in four divisions, as they were doing.

Indeed it was merely with a view of cutting off their retreat, that the Utah chieftain had adopted the plan. Had he not taken the precaution to approach from all sides at once, it would have been necessary for him to have waited for the night, before any attack could have been made. In daylight it would have been impossible to get even within shot-range of the enemy.

The Arapahoes were as well mounted as the Utahs; and perceiving their inferiority in numbers, they would have refused to fight, and ridden off, perhaps, without losing a man.

The strategic maneuver of the Utah was meant to force the Red-Hand to a conflict. This was its purpose, and no other. For the Arapahoes, there appeared no alternative but stand and fight.

The attack, coming from four points at one and the same time, and by superior numbers must have caused them fear. How could it be otherwise? It failed, however, to create any remarkable confusion. We could see them hurrying around the butte, in the direction of their *cavallada*; and, in an incredibly short space of time, most of the warriors had leaped to their horses, and with their long spears towering high above their heads, had thrown themselves into an irregular formation.

The plain at this moment presented an animated spectacle. He upon the summit of the butte, if still alive, must have viewed it with singular emotions.

The painted Arapahoes clustered around their chief, and for the moment appearing in a close crowd, silent and immobile; from north, south, east, and west, the four bands of the Utahs approaching in rapid gallop, each led by its war-chief; while the "Ugh! alloo!" pealing from five hundred throats, reverberated from cliff to cliff, filling the valley with its vengeful echoes!

Would the Arapahoes await the shock of all four divisions at once? All were about equally distant, and closing in at equal speed. Surely the Red-Hand would not stay to be thus attacked.

"*Carrambo!* I wonder they are not off before this!" shouted Archilete, who was galloping by my side. "Ha, yonder!" added he, "a party on foot making from the grove of *alamos!* They are waiting for those to come up—that's what's been detaining them. *Mira!*"

As the Mexican spoke, he pointed to a small tope of cottonwoods, which grew isolated about three or four hundred yards from the mound.

Out of this was seen issuing some fifteen or twenty Arapahoes. They were on foot—except

three or four, who appeared to be carried by the others.

"Their wounded!" continued the trapper. "They've had them under the bushes to keep the sun off them, I suppose. *Mira!* they are meeting them with horses! They mean flight then."

A party with led-horses were seen galloping out from the base of the butte, evidently to take up the men on foot—who were still hurrying toward their mounted comrades, as fast as the nature of their duty would permit them.

There were several groups of the Indians on foot each no doubt in charge of a disabled comrade.

One crowd appeared to encircle a man who was not borne upon their shoulders, but was moving on his feet. The violent gesticulations of those who surrounded him drew our attention. The man was evidently being menaced and urged forward—as if he went against his will.

"*Carrai!*" exclaimed the Mexican, "*he is not one of their wounded. A captive! One of your *camaradas*, I dare say?*"

"No doubt of it," I replied, at that moment equally guided to the conjecture.

"Wagh!" exclaimed the trapper, "the poor fellow's scalp is in danger just now. I wonder they take all that trouble to get him away alive—that puzzles me, *amigo!* I think it high time they looked to their own lives, without being so particular about that of their prisoner. *Sanissima Virgen!* As I live, there's a woman among them!"

"Yes—I see her—I know her. Her presence explains why they are taking him alive."

"You know her?"

"And him too. Poor fellow! I hope she will befriend him; but—"

I was hindered from continuing the explanation. Just at that moment, the led horses were rushed up to; and those in charge of the wounded were seen to spring to their backs. Here and there, a double mount proclaimed that the disabled men were still capable of making a last effort for their lives.

All had got upon their horses, and in a straggling crowd were making to join the main band; when, just at that moment, one of the horses that carried two men was seen to swerve suddenly from the line, and heading up the valley, come galloping in our direction.

The horse appeared to have taken fright, and shied away from the others; while the men upon his back were tossing and writhing about, as if trying to restrain him!

At the same instant, half a dozen mounted Arapahoes were seen shooting forth from the crowd, and with loud yells galloping in pursuit of the runaway! The double-loaded steed—a powerful animal—kept on his course; but, until he had approached within three or four hundred paces of our own front, could I account for this strange maneuver. Then was I enabled to comprehend the mysterious escape.

The rider upon the croup was Frank Wingrove! He upon the saddle was a red Arapaho. The bodies of the two men appeared to be lashed together by a rawhide rope; but, in front of the Indian, I could perceive the muscular arms of the young backwoodsman tightly embracing the chest of the savage, while with the reins in his fingers he was guiding the gallop of the horse!

With a shout of joy I hailed the escape of my comrade, now no longer problematical. In a score of seconds more, we should meet.

The pursuers—satisfied that his re-capture was hopeless without risking their own scalps—had already turned with a despairing shout, and were galloping back. Wingrove was near enough to hear the cry of encouragement that passed from my lips; and, soon recognizing me, despite the disguise of the serape, headed his horse directly toward us.

"Hooraw, cap'n!" cried he, as he came up. "Hev you e'er a knife to cut me cl'ar o' this Indjun? Durn the nigger! I've got him in a leetle o' the tightest fix he's been in for a while, I reck'n. Dog-gone ye! keep still, ye skunk, or I'll smash every rib in y'er body! Quiet now!"

During all this time the Indian was making the most strenuous efforts to free himself from the grasp of his powerful adversary—now endeavoring to throw himself down from the horse, anon trying to turn the animal in an opposite direction. But the thongs intended to secure his captive—and which had no doubt been wound around both of them by a third hand—had become bonds for himself.

Wingrove, who had by some means wrenched his wrists free from their fastenings, had turned the tables upon his captor, by transforming him into a captive!

I chanced to be without a knife; but the Mexican was supplied with the necessary implement; and, drawing it from its sheath, shot past me to use it. I thought he intended to cut the thongs that bound the two men together. So did he; but not till after he had performed another operation—which consisted in plunging his blade between the ribs of the Arapaho!

At the stab, the Indian gave utterance to his wild death-shout. In the same instant his head coggled over upon his shoulder, his body relaxed its muscular tension, and hung limp over the rawhide rope.

A snip of the red blade severed the thong; and the Indian's body sliding down from the withers of the horse, fell with a dull dead sound upon the turf.

"Here, *Americano!*" cried the trapper, holding out the ensanguined knife to Wingrove; "take this weapon for want of a better. Let us on! See! the *pícaros* are making off. *Vamos! nos vamos!*"

The incident had delayed us but for a very short while—perhaps not half a minute; but as we returned to the charging gallop, most of our party had passed us; and the foremost were already within rifle-range, and opening fire upon the Arapahoes.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CHARGE.

THE horsemen who had forged ahead, for a while, hindered me from seeing the enemy. The Utahs had halted, and were discharging their guns. The smoke from their shots shrouded both allies and enemies; but, from the fact of a halt having been made, I presumed the Arapahoes were making stand by the butte. It was not so.

After the first round of shots, the firing ceased, and the Utahs again went charging onward. The Arapahoes had given way, and were fleeing down the valley. There they must meet Wa-ka-ra. And this or something like it was their intention.

With the four divisions closing upon them from all sides at once, they saw there was no chance of saving themselves—except by making a desperate charge on some one singly, in the hope of causing it to yield, and thus open for them a way of escape.

They had no difficulty in making choice of which they should meet. The band of Wa-ka-ra was between them and their own country. It was the direction in which they must ultimately retreat; and this decided them to take down the valley.

A slight swell in the plain, which we were at that moment crossing, gave me a view of the retreating Arapahoes. In the distance, I could see the band of Wa-ka-ra advancing toward them at full speed. In a few seconds would meet in shivering charge these mortal foes.

The Utahs of our party were urging their horses to utmost speed. Well mounted as were myself and companions, we were unable to overtake them. Those that came from right and left had suddenly swerved from their course; and in two converging lines were sweeping down the valley to the assistance of their chief.

We passed close under the edge of the butte. In the excitement of the chase, I had almost forgotten to look up—when a shrill shout recalled to my memory the captive on the cross. The cry came from the summit—from Sure-shot himself. Thank Heaven; he lived!

"Hooza! hoozay!" shouted the voice. "Heaving speed ye, whos'ever ye be! Hooza! hoozay! Arter the verming, an' gi'e 'em goss! Sculp every mother's son o' 'em. Hooza! hoozay!"

There was no time to make reply to these cries of encouragement. Enough to know that it was our old comrade who gave utterance to them. It proved he was still living; and, echoing his exulting shout, we galloped onward.

It was a fearful sight to behold the two dark bands as they dashed forward upon one another—like opposing waves of the angry ocean. Through the horsemen in front of me, I could see the meeting, and hear the shock. It was accompanied by wild yells—by voices heard in loud taunting tones—by the rattling of shields, the crashing collision of spear-shafts, and the sharp detonations of rifles.

The band of Wa-ka-ra recoiled for a moment.

It was by far the weakest; and had it been left to itself, would have sustained defeat in this terrible encounter. But the Utahs were armed both with rifles and pistols; and the latter playing upon the ranks of the Arapahoes, were fast thinning them.

Dusky warriors were seen dropping from their horses; while the terrified animals went galloping over the field—their wild neighs adding to the uproar of the fight.

There was but one charge—a short but terrible conflict—and then the fight was over. It became transformed, almost in an instant, to a disorderly flight.

When the hot skurry had ended, the remnant of the prairie-horsemen was seen heading down the valley, followed by the four bands of the Utahs—who had now closed together.

Pressing onward in the pursuit, they still vociferated their wild *Ugh! aloo!*—firing shots at intervals, as they rode within reach of their flying foemen.

Neither Wingrove nor I had an opportunity of taking part in the affray. It was over before we could ride up; and, indeed, had it been otherwise, neither of us could have been of much service to our allies. Painted as both were, and in full war-costume—in other words, naked to the breech-clout—we could not have distinguished friends from foes!

It was partly this consideration that had occasioned us to halt. We drew up on the ground where the collision had occurred with the band of Wa-ka-ra. We looked upon a spectacle that might at any other time have horrified us.

A hundred bodies lay over the sward, all dead. There were Utahs as well as Arapahoes; but, though we could not distinguish the warriors of the two tribes in the confusion of the fight, there was no difficulty in identifying their dead. There was a signal difference in the aspect of the slain Indians.

Around the skulls of the Utahs, the thick black tresses were still clustering; while upon the heads of the Arapahoes there was neither hair nor skin. Every one of them had been already scalped.

Wounded men were sitting up, or propped against dead bodies—each with two or three comrades bending over him. Horses were galloping around, their lazos trailing at will; while weapons of every kind—spears, shields, bows, quivers and arrows—were strewn over the sward.

A group of about a dozen men appeared at some distance, clustered around a particular object. It was the dead body of a man—a chief, no doubt? Not without feelings of apprehension did I approach the spot. It might be the noble Wa-ka-ra? I rode up, and looked over the shoulders of those who encircled the corpse. A glance was sufficient to put an end to my apprehensions.

The body was covered with blood, and pierced with many wounds. It was frightfully mutilated; but I was able to identify the features as those of Red-Hand, the chief of the Arapahoes!

Scarred and gashed though it was, I could still trace those sinister lines that in life had rendered that face so terrible to behold. It was even more hideous in death; but the Utahs who stood around no longer regarded it with fear. The terror, which their dread foe had oft inspired within them, was now being retaliated in the mockery of his mutilated remains!

The Mexican had ascertained that Wa-ka-ra was still unhurt, and heading the pursuit.

Having myself no further interest in the scene, I turned away from it; and, with Wingrove by my side, rode back toward the butte.

CHAPTER LVII.

TRAGIC AND COMIC.

SOME words passed between us as we went. For my companion I had news that would make him supremely happy. Our conversation turned not on that. "Soon enough," thought I, "when they shall come together. Let both hearts be blessed at

the same time." Ah! how my own was bleeding. Little suspected the Spanish hunter how his tale had tortured me!

Wingrove, in brief detail, gave me the particulars of his escape. Like myself, he had been captured without receiving any serious injury. They would have killed him afterward, but for the interference of the Chicasaw, who, by some means, had gained an ascendancy over the Red-Hand! In the breast of this desperate woman burned alternately the passions of love and revenge. The former had been for the time in the ascendant; but she had saved the captive's life, only in the hope of making him her captive. She had carried him to the copse, where he had passed the night in her company—one moment caressed and entreated—in the next reviled, and menaced with the most cruel death! In vain had he looked for an opportunity to get away from her. Like a jealous tigress had she watched him throughout the live-long night; and it was only in the confusion, created by our sudden approach, that he had found a chance of escape from the double guardianship in which he had been held. All this was made known to me in a few hurried phrases.

Sure-shot! we were within speaking distance; but who could have identified the Yankee in such a guise? The tri-colored escutcheon I had myself so lately borne—the black face, shoulders, and arms—the white circle on the breast—the red spot—all just as they had painted me!

"Jeheosophet an' pigeon-pie!" cried he, as he saw us approach; "air it yeou, captin? an' Wingrove, teoo!"

"Yes, brave comrade! Your shot has saved us all. Patience! we shall soon set you free!"

Leaping down from our horses, we hurried up the sloping path. I was still anxious about Sure-shot's safety; but in another moment my anxiety was at an end.

He was yet unscathed.

Like myself, he had received some scratches, but no wound of a dangerous character. Like myself, he had died a hundred deaths, and yet lived! His gleesome spirit had sustained him throughout the dread ordeal. He had even joked with his cruel tormentors! Now that the dark hour was past, his *jewe d'esprit* were poured forth with a continuous volubility. No; not continuous. At intervals, a shadow crossed his spirit, as it did that of all of us. We could not fail to lament the fate of the unfortunate Hibernian.

"Poor Petrick!" said Sure-shot, as we descended the slope, "he wear the joyfulest kimrade I ever hed, an' we must gi' him the berril o' a Christyan. I wonder neow what on airth them verming hes done wi' him? Wheer kin they have hid his body?"

"True—where is it? It was out yonder on the plain? I saw it there; they had scalped him."

"Yeas; they sculped him at the time we wear all captered. He wear lying jest out their last night at sundown. He ain't their now; nor ain't a-been this mornin' or I'd 'a' see'd him. What do ees think they've done wi' him anyhow?"

The disappearance of the body was singular enough. It had undoubtedly been removed from the spot where it had lain, and was now nowhere to be seen!

It was scarcely probable that the wolves had eaten it, for the Indians had been all night upon the ground; and their camp-fires were near. True, the coyotes would have cared little for that; but surely the brutes could not have carried the body clear away? The bones, at least, would have remained? There were none—not a trace either of body or bones!

We passed around the butte, and made search on the other side. There was no dead body there—no remains of one. Ha—the river! It swept past within fifty yards of the mound. It would account for the disappearance of the corpse.

We walked toward the stream, half mechanically. We had little expectation of finding the remains of the unfortunate man. The current rushed rapidly on; the body would have been taken along with it?

"Maybe it mout hev lodged somewheres?" suggested Sure-shot. "Ef we shed find it, captin, I'd like to put a sod over him, for old times' sake. Shell we try down the stream?"

We followed the bank downward. A little below grew willows, forming a selvedge to the river's edge. Their culms curved over, till the long, quivering leaves dipped into the water. Here and there were thickets of them extending back into the plain. Only by passing through these could the bank of the river be reached. We entered among the willows, Wingrove going in the advance.

I saw him stoop suddenly, as if to examine the ground. An exclamation escaped him, and the words:

"Someb'dy's crawled through hyar, or been dragged through—one o' the two ways. No!" added he, after a moment, "he's not been dragged; he's been creepin' on his hands an' knees. Look thar! the track o' a knee, as cl'ar as daylight; an', by the 'tarnal! it's been covered wi' broadcloth. No injun kud 'a' made that mark!"

We all bent over to examine the sign.

Sure enough, it was the track of a man's knee; and the plastic mud exhibited on its surface a print of fretted lines, which must have been made by coarse threadbare cloth!

"By gosh!" exclaimed Sure-shot, "that eer's the infantry overall—the government cloth to a sartingty. Petrick's been about heer. Lordy, 'tain't possyble he's still living?"

"Shure-shat! Shure-shat! Mother ov Moses! is it yerself I hear?"

The voice reached us in a hoarse whisper. It appeared to rise out of the earth! For some moments, we all stood, as if petrified by surprise. "Shure-shat!" continued the voice, "won't yez help me out? I'm too wake to get up the bank."

"Petrick, as I'm a livin' sinner! Good Lordy, Petrick! wheer air ye? 'Tain't possyble yeer alive?"

"Och, an' shure I'm aloive, that same. But I'm more than half did, for all that; an' nearly drowned to boot. Arrah, boys! rache me a hand, an' pull me out—for I can't move meself—one of my legs is broke."

We all three rushed down to the water—whence the voice appeared to come. Under the drooping willows, where the current had undermined the bank, we perceived an object in motion. A fearful

object it was to look upon; it was the encrimsoned skull of our scalped comrade! His body was submerged below the surface. His head alone was visible—a horrid sight!

The three of us leaped at once into the stream; and, raising the poor fellow in our arms, lifted him out on the bank.

It was as he had alleged. One of his legs was broken below the knee; and other frightful wounds appeared in different parts of his body.

No wonder the Indians had believed him dead, when they stripped off that terrible trophy!

Notwithstanding the ill usage he had received, there was still hope. His wounds though ugly to the eye, were none of them mortal. With care, he might recover; and taking him up as tenderly as possible, we conveyed him back to the butte.

The Arapahoes had left their *impedimenta* behind them—blankets and robes at discretion.

With these a soft couch was prepared under the shade of the wagon body, and the wounded man placed upon it. Such dressing, as we were able to give, was at once administered to his wounds; and we found new joy in the anticipation of his recovery.

His disappearance—from the spot where he had been left for dead—was explained. He had "played possum," as he himself expressed it. Though roughly handled, and actually senseless for a time, he had still clung to life. He knew that the Indians believed him dead—else why should they have scalped him? With a faint hope of being left upon the field, he had lain still, without stirring hand or foot; and the savages, otherwise occupied, had not noticed him after taking his scalp.

By some accident, his hands had got over his face; and, perceiving that these screened his countenance from observation, he had permitted them to remain so. With half-opened eyes, he could see between his fingers, and note many of the movements that were passing upon the plain in front of him—all this without the Indians having the slightest suspicion that he lived!

It was a terrible time for him—an ordeal equal to that endured by Sure-shot and myself. Every now and then some half drunken savage would come staggering past; and he knew not how soon some one of these strollers might stick a spear into him, out of mere wantonness!

On the arrival of night, his hopes had revived; and the cool air had also the effect of partially restoring his strength. The savages, carousing around their fires, took no notice of him; and as soon as darkness was fairly down he had commenced crawling off in the direction of the river.

He had a double object in going thither. He was suffering from horrid thirst; and he hoped there to find relief, as well as a hiding-place.

After crawling for more than an hour, he had succeeded in reaching the bank; and, taking to the water, he had waded down, and concealed himself under the willows—in the place where we had found him.

Such was the adventure of the *ci-devant* soldier, Patrick O'Tigg—an escape almost miraculous!

As if fulfilling the laws of dramatic justice—that the farce should succeed the tragedy—our attention was at this moment called to a ludicrous incident. The Mexican trapper had ridden up and halted beside the wagon; when all at once his eyes became fixed upon an object that lay near at hand upon the grass. It was the black silk hat of the ex-rifleman, already mentioned in our narrative.

After gazing at it for a moment, the Mexican slid down from his horse; and, hobbling toward the hat, he took it up. Then uttering a fierce "*Carajo*," he dashed the "tile" back to the ground, and commenced stamping upon it, as if it had been some venomous serpent he desired to annihilate!

"Hilloo! theer, *hombre*!" shouted Sure-shot. "What the ole scratch are ye about? Why, ye yellor-bellied fool, thet's my hat yer stompin' on!"

"Your hat?" echoed the trapper in a contemptuous tone. "*Carramba*, *senor*! you should be ashamed of yourself. Any man who would wear a silk hat! Waghl!"

"An' why ain't a silk hat as good's any other?" "*Maldito sea*!" continued the trapper, taking the wooden leg from his waist, and hammering the hat with it against a stone—"maldito sombrero! but for that accursed invention, we poor trappers wouldn't be as we are now. *Carramba*! it's fetched beaver down to a plew a plug; while only ten years ago, we could get six pesos the skin! Only think of that! *Caraj-i-i*!"

Pronouncing this last exclamation with bitter asperity, the incensed trapper gave the unfortunate hat one more blow with his timber leg; and then, spurning the battered tile from his toe, hobbled back to his horse. Sure-shot was disposed to be angry, but a word set all right. I perfectly comprehended the nature of the trapper's antipathy to silk hats, and explained it to my comrade. In their eyes the absurd head-gear is more hideous than even to those who are condemned to wear it—for the trappers well know that the introduction of the silk hat has been the ruin of their peculiar calling.

"'Twarnt much o' a hat, arter all," said Sure-shot, reconciled by the explanation. "It b'longed to the sutler at the fort; for yee see, capting, as we left there for a leetle bit o' a hurry, I couldn't lay my claws on my own ole forage-cap, so I took the hat in its place, an' thet's how I kim by the thing. But heer's a hat: perhaps, mister, this heer'll pleeze ye better? Will it, eh?"

As Sure-shot put the question he took up the plumed bonnet of an Arapaho warrior, which had been left lying among the rocks, and, adjusting the gaudy circlet upon his head, strode backward and forward over the ground with all the swelling majesty of an Indian dandy. The odd-looking individual and his actions caused the laughter of the bystanders to break forth in loud peals. The Mexican fairly screamed, interlarding his cachinnations with loud "*santissimas*," and other Spanish exclamations, while even the wounded man under the wagon was unable to restrain himself at the mirth-provoking spectacle.

CHAPTER LVIII.

INDIAN BLAZONRY.

I must hurry rapidly over the events of the next few days, when so many springs of happiness welled out for two people, at least—Marian Holt and Frank Wingrove. All was explained when the two lovers

met, and the death of the Indian girl, Su-wa-nee, in the fight, removed their last cause of jealousy. Turn we to our story, when Wingrove, Marian, Sure-shot and myself, with the redoubtable Peg-leg for an ally, followed once more on the trail of the caravan—this time with the object of penetrating its recesses in disguise, leaving O'Tigg behind in the care of the hospitable Utahs. Three days later we went into camp within five miles of the caravan.

At earliest dawn, and long before the sun had gilded the snowy summits of the Spanish peaks, we were all afoot. A breakfast was hastily prepared, and still more hastily eaten. After that we proceeded to equip ourselves for the masquerade. Peg-leg acted as principal *costumier*; and well understood he the *role* he was called upon to perform. Perfectly acquainted with the Utah costume—both that used for war and the chase—there was no fear about the correctness of his heraldry being called in question.

He knew every quartering of the Utah escutcheon with a minuteness of detail that would have done credit to a king-at-arms.

For himself he needed no disguise. As a trapper of Taos, he might also be an associate of Utah hunters; and personally unknown to the Mormons, they would have no other thoughts about him, further than that their friend Wa-ka-ra had sent him to guide them across the deserts of the Colorado.

At the Mormon camp, therefore, he could present himself in his Mexican costume, without the Saints having the slightest suspicion as to his true character.

This left him free to lend his services to the rest of us, and assist in our heraldic emblazonment.

His first essay was upon myself.

My features being sufficiently pronounced, rendered it all the more easy to make an Indian of me; and a uniform coat of vermillion over my neck, face, and hands, transformed me into a somewhat formidable-looking warrior.

A buckskin hunting tunic, leggings, and moccasins concealed the remainder of my skin, while some locks of long hair extracted from the mane and tail of my Arab, and craftily united to my own dark tresses, with the plumed bonnet and drooping crest over all, completed a costume that would have done me credit at a Parisian *bal masque*.

With equal facility was accomplished the metamorphosis of the young backwoodsman, but not so easily that of Sure-shot. The *nez retroussé*, thin yellow hair, and green-gray eyes, appeared to be insurmountable obstacles to the Indianizing of the ex-rifleman.

Peg-leg, however, proved an artist of skill. The *chevelure* of Sure-shot, well saturated with charcoal paste, assumed a different hue. A black circle around each eye neutralized the tint of both iris and pupil.

To his face was given a ground-coat of red ocher; while some half dozen dark stripes, painted longitudinally over it, and running parallel to the nose, extinguished the snub—transforming the Yankee into as good an Indian as any upon the ground.

Marian was her own "dresser;" and while we were engaged outside, was making her toilet within the tent.

Her costume would require but little alteration; it was Indian already. Her face alone needed masking; and how was that to be done?

To speak the truth, I was apprehensive upon the score of her disguise. I could not help reflecting on the fearful fate that awaited her, should the counterfeit be detected and the girl identified. All along I had felt uneasy upon this point, and had been endeavoring to devise some scheme by which to avoid the imprudence of her presenting herself in the Mormon camp.

But the thought of Lilian—the perilous situation in which she was placed—perhaps, more than all, the selfishness of my own love, had hindered me from thinking of any definite alternative.

When I saw the huntress-maiden issue forth from her tent, her face empurpled with the juice of the *all-gria* berries, her cheeks exhibiting each a circle of red spots, with a line of similar markings extended across her forehead, I no longer felt apprehension for the result.

Though the hideous tattooing could not hide the charms of her speaking countenance, it had so changed its expression that even Wingrove himself would not have recognized her. More like was it to baffle the scrutiny of father and false husband.

In due time we were all dressed for the drama; and, after making a *cache* of our cast-off garments, we struck tents and moved forward to the performance.

The faithful Wolf accompanied us. It was against my wish, and contrary to the counsel of our guide; but Marian would not part with a companion that more than once had protected her from cruel enemies.

The dog had been disguised, as the rest of us. Shorn of his shaggy coat, with his tail trimmed smooth as that of a grayhound—his skin, moreover, stained Indian fashion—there seemed but slight danger that the animal could be recognized.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE MORMON TRAIN.

The last rays of the setting sun were sparkling on the selenite of the Silver Mountains, as we approached the encampment of the Saints. We had got near enough to make out the dimensions of the caravan. We saw that there were about a score of the large tilted wagons, with several smaller vehicles. The latter, with springs, were no doubt the more luxurious traveling carriages of such Saints as may have been in easier circumstances at home. With the larger wagons, a "corral" had been formed—as is the usual custom of the prairie caravan.

As we drew near the camp, we could perceive that in the most approved fashion had the Mormons constructed their *corral*.

Most of the lighter vehicles were inside the inclosure; and there we could see the forms of women and children moving about in an excited manner—as if they had retreated thither on discovering our approach. The men still remained outside; and the horses and horned cattle had been left undisturbed. Our party was not large enough to have created an alarm—even had our arrival been unexpected. It could scarcely have been so. No doubt they took

us for what we were: the emissaries of the Utah chief!

When within a few hundred yards of the camp, a party, already on horseback, came trotting toward us. Archilete had hoisted a piece of white fawn-skin on his gun-rod—the world-known symbol of peace, and so understood by the red-men of America. A towel or table-cloth, or something of the sort, was held up in answer; and after the demonstration the mounted men spurred forward to meet us.

When we had approached within a dozen lengths of each other both parties reined up; and the Mexican and Mormon leader, separating from their respective followers, met midway between the two parties, shook hands, and entered into conversation.

What they said was simple enough. I could hear the trapper declaring in broken English the nature of our errand—that he had been sent by Wa-ka-ra to act as their guide; and that we his *compañeros*, were the Utah hunters, to provide game for the caravan.

Of the Mormons who rode up to us there were half a dozen in all; and I was fain to hope that they were not a fair specimen of the emigrant party. They were not—as I afterward ascertained. They were the *Danites*, or *Destroying Angels*, that accompanied the train. "*Destroying devils*," would have been a more appropriate appellation; for six more villainous-looking individuals I had never beheld. There was no sign of the angelic, neither in their eyes nor features—not a trace; but, on the contrary, each might have passed for an impersonation of the opposite character—a very "*devil incarnate*!" Five of them I had never seen before—at least to remember them. The sixth only on one occasion. Him I remembered well. The man who had once looked in the face of the ex-attorney's clerk, and *ci-devant* schoolmaster of Swampville, was not likely soon to cast that countenance from his remembrance. It was Stebbins who was talking to the Mexican. The dialogue was of brief duration. The tale told by the trapper was scarcely news; it had been expected; and was therefore accepted without suspicion. The interview ended by the Mormon leader pointing to a place where we might pitch our tents—outside the wagon inclosure, and near the bank of the river. This was just what we desired; and, proceeding directly to the spot, we commenced unpacking our paraphernalia.

CHAPTER LX.

THE CORRALED CAMP.

As soon as our quality was known, the Saints came crowding around us. The corral poured forth its contents—until nine-tenths of the whole caravan, men, women and children, stood gazing upon us, with that stare of idiotic wonder peculiar to the humbler classes of countries called civilized.

We managed to withstand the ordeal of their scrutiny with an assumed air of true savage indifference. Not without an effort, however; since it was difficult to resist laughing at the grotesque exclamations and speeches, which our appearance and movements elicited from the wondering yokels. We were cautious not to notice their remarks—appearing as if we understood them not.

Peg-leg, by the aid of his Anglo-American jargon, picked up among the mountain-men, was able to satisfy them with an occasional reply. The rest of us said nothing; but, to all appearance earnestly occupied with our own affairs, only by stealth turned our eyes on the spectators.

I could perceive that the huntress was the chief attraction, and for a moment my apprehensions were sufficiently keen.

The girl had done nothing to disguise her sex, the mask extending no further than to her face and features. Her neck, hands, and wrists—all of her skin that might be exposed—were stained Indian of course; and there would have been little likelihood of their detecting the false epidermis under a casual observation. Had it been a mere ordinary person, painted as she was, she might have passed for an Indian without difficulty. As it was, however, her voluptuous beauty had tempted a closer scrutiny; and, spite of her disfigured features, I saw glances directed upon her expressive of secret but passionate observation.

We had now an opportunity of studying the Mormons; for not one of them had the slightest idea that their talk was understood by us. Most of them appeared to be of the humbler class of emigrants—farm-people or those of mechanical calling—artisans of the common trades—shoemakers, blacksmiths, joiners, and the like.

The women were of all ages, and, it might be added, of all nations. Several European tongues mingled in the *mélée* of sounds; but the one which predominated was the jargon of the Welsh Principality. Many of the latter wore their picturesque native costume—the red-hooded cloak and kirtle—and some were unspeakably fair, with the fine white teeth, fair complexion, and ruddy cheeks, common to other branches of the Celtic race, but nowhere so characteristic as among the fair maidens of Cambria.

My own eyes dwelt not upon these. Ever since our arrival upon the ground, I had been watching with keen glances the opening that led into the corral. Every one who came forth—man or woman—had been the object of my scrutiny. But my glances had been given in vain, and were not rewarded by the recognition of a single individual.

After all, had we taken the wrong track? Might not Holt have kept on with the gold-diggers? The story of the Chicasaw signified nothing.

"The squatter may have resisted the will of his Apostolic companion," I muttered to myself, "and separating himself from the Mormon party, have gone on with the diggers? No! yonder! Holt himself, as I live!"

The exclamatory phrases were called forth by the appearance of a tall man in the opening between the wagons.

It was Holt.

He was standing still, and must have reached the spot he occupied but the moment before, when my eyes for an instant had been turned away. The Herculean frame, and great rufous beard hanging over his breast, proclaimed to my eyes the identity of the Tennessean squatter, and the costume confirmed it. It was precisely the same worn by him on that eventful morning, when standing before me with his long rifle raised against my life.

CHAPTER LXI.
BEAUTY EMBROWED.

THE apparition—for it had something of the character of one—restored my equanimity. Holt was with the Mormon train, and of course Lillian also.

Drawing comfort from this reflection, I was turning to attend to my horse. The gallant creature had been sadly neglected of late, and needed my care. A huge Mexican *silla*, that with its trappings half-covered its body, would have sufficiently disguised him; but I had not much fear of his being recognized. Stebbins and Holt had both seen him—once only, and then under such circumstances that it was scarcely possible they could have noticed him. Otherwise they might have remembered him readily enough.

I had no fear, however, and was about to remove the saddle, when an object presented itself to my eyes that interrupted my intention, causing me to remain fixed and immobile. In the open ground, scarcely twenty paces from where I stood, was a form that fell upon the eye like a beam of empyrean light in the midst of deepest darkness—a girl of golden roseate hue, with a *chevelure* of yellow hair hanging to her haunches in all its lustrous luxuriance! Scarcely twenty paces separated me from Lillian Holt; for need I say that it was Lillian herself?

The path she was following would conduct her to the bank of the river about a hundred yards above where our tents had been pitched, and a like distance from the nearest of the wagons. Her object in going thither was evident. A tin water-can, hanging by its iron handle over her wrist, proclaimed her errand.

On reaching the river she did not proceed to fill the vessel, but, placing it near the water's edge, sat down beside it. The bank, slightly elevated above the stream, offered a sort of projecting bench. Upon this she had seated herself, in such an attitude that her limbs hung over, until one foot was immersed in the water.

At this crisis an idea occurred to me that promised to aid me in obtaining the interview I longed for. My Arab had not yet been given to the grass. Near where Lillian was seated the herbage was luxuriant, more so than anywhere around. Upon it I could picket my steed, or hold him in hand while he should browse.

I lost not a minute in removing the saddle and adjusting the halter, and scarcely another in approaching the spot where the young girl was seated. I drew near, however, with due circumspection, fearful that by a too brusque approach I might hasten her departure. I gave my horse to the grass, now and then guiding him with a pull upon the halter, which I still held in my hand. The young girl saw that I was gradually nearing her, and looked twice or three times toward me, not with any air of alarm. Rather of interest, I thought; but this may have been only a fancy. My horse appeared to share her attention—indeed, more than share it: since she fixed her eyes upon him frequently and looked longer at him each time. Was it the noble form that was attracting her admiration? Or was there something that called up a recollection? *She* might remember the horse.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE LETTER.

APPARENTLY she did not, for soon she went back to the camp. Her body was bent to one side by the weight of the water-can; while her long golden hair, falling in confusion over the straining arm, almost swept the sward at her feet. The toilsome attitude only displayed in greater perfection the splendid development of that form, which death alone could now hinder me from gazing upon.

I had taken from my pocket a scrap of paper, and penciled upon it three simple words. I knew the paper on which I was writing: it was the half-leaf of a letter well remembered. The letter itself was not there; it was within the folds of my pocket-book; but there was writing on the fly-leaf, and on both faces of it. On one side were those cherished verses, whose sweet, simple strain, still vibrating upon the chords of my heart, I cannot help repeating:

"I think of thee when Morning springs
From sleep with plumage bathed in dew,
And like a young bird lifts her wings
Of gladness on the welkin blue.
And when at noon the breath of love
O'er flower and stream is wandering free,
And sent in music from the grove—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

"I think of thee when soft and wide
The Evening spreads her robe of light,
And like a young and timid bride
Sits blushing in the arms of Night.
And when the moon's sweet crescent springs
In light or heaven's deep, waveless sea,
And stars are forth like blessed things—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

"Oh, sir! it is very, very true! I do think of you, and I am sure I shall do so as long as I live!"

"LILLIAN HOLT."

On the reverse side of the page I had penned, or rather penciled a response. Not then, but in an idle hour by the way, with the presentiment that it might some time reach the hands of her for whom it was intended. In those hands I was now determined to place it, leaving the issue to the cipher itself. The answer ran thus:

"TO LILLIAN.

"As music sweet, thy gentle lay
Hath found an echo in my heart;
At morn, at eve, by night, by day,
'Tis never from my thoughts apart;
I hear the strain in every breeze
That blows o'er flower, leaf, and tree;
Low murmuring, the birds and bees
All seem to sing—I think of thee!

"Perhaps of me no more a thought
Lingers within thy bosom blest;
For time and absence both are fraught
With danger to the lover's rest?
Oh, Lillian! if thy gentlest breath
Should whisper that sad truth to me,
My heart would soon be cold in death—
Though dying, still 'twould think of thee.

"EDWARD WARFIELD.

"The Indian Hunter."

The words at the moment added were those appended to my own name—which I had introduced to aid in the recognition.

However inappropriate might be the scheme for making myself known, I had no time to conceive any other. Even a word might betray me. Under this apprehension, I resolved to remain silent, and watch for the occasion when I might effect the secret conveyance of the paper.

As the young girl drew near I stepped toward her, pointing to my lips and making sign that I wished to drink. The action did not alarm her. On the contrary, she stopped, and smiling kindly on the thirsty savage, offered the can, raising it up before her. I took the vessel in my hands, holding the little billet conspicuous between my stained fingers. Conspicuous only to her, for from all other eyes the can concealed it, even from those of the bizarre *duenna*, who had faced round and was still standing near. Not a word escaped me, as I pretended to drink. I only nodded toward the paper as I raised the vessel to my lips.

Ah! that weird instinct of a woman's heart—a woman who loves! How pleasant to watch its subtle play, when we know that it is exerted in our favor! I saw not the action, nor yet the emotion that may have been depicted on that radiant face. My eyes were averted. I dared not trust them to watch the effect. I only knew that the can was taken from my hands, the paper along with it; and like a dream the fair water-carrier passed from before me, leaving me alone upon the spot!

CHAPTER LXIII.

A SISTER'S APPEAL.

I HASTENED to inform Marian of what had passed, having returned to the tents, without giving any sign of the excitement that was stirring within my breast. Why not to-night? Why not at once—within the hour? These were my reflections, put interrogatively, as I hurried over the ground. The huntress still remained within her tent; but, enjoying the fraternal privilege, I could enter; and, stooping, I passed under the covering of skins.

"You have seen sister Lillian!" she said, affirmatively, as I entered.

"I have."

"And spoken with her?"

"No; I dared not trust myself to speak; but I have given her a token of recognition."

"In writing? I saw you. She knows, then, that you are here?"

"By this time she should—that is, if she has found an opportunity to look at the paper."

"She will find that, I dare say. Oh, she is beautiful—very beautiful. I do not wonder, sir, that you love her. Were I a man—Knows she that I, too, am here?"

"Not yet. I feared to tell her, even in writing. I feared that in the sudden transport of joy which such a discovery would produce she might proclaim it to your father—perhaps to him."

"You are right—there might have been a risk of that. She must not know that I am here till we can caution her against declaring it. How do you propose to act?"

"I have come to take counsel from you. If we could only make known to her that you are present, she might find an opportunity of stealing forth, and in the darkness all the rest could be accomplished. Even to-night—why not this very night?"

"Why not?" echoed the huntress, catching eagerly at the idea. "The sooner the better. But how am I to see her? Should I enter their camp? Perhaps—"

"If you write to her, I—"

"Would, stranger? say *could*. Writing is not one of my accomplishments. My father cared little to teach me; my mother still less—she cared not at all. Alas! poor ignorant me! I cannot even write my own name!"

"It matters not; dictate what you would say to her. I have here paper and pencil, and shall write for you. If she has read the other, she will be on the lookout, and no doubt we may find an opportunity of giving a note to her."

"And she of reading it, no doubt. Yes, it does seem the best course we can pursue—the surest and safest. Surely Lillian has not forgotten me? Surely she will follow the advice of a sister who dearly loves her?"

Drawing out my pencil, and tearing a leaf from the memorandum-book, I stood ready to act as amanuensis. The intelligent though unlettered maiden commenced the dictation:

"BELOVED SISTER:—A friend writes for me—one whom you know. It is Marian who speaks—your own sister Marian—still living and well. I am here with others—in the disguise of Indians—those you have seen. We are here on your account alone. We have come to save you from a danger—oh, sister! a dreadful danger, which your innocent heart cannot have dreamed of!"

I was not so certain of this. The shade I had observed upon Lillian's countenance—produced by the taunting speeches of the mulatta—had convinced me that the young girl was not without some presentiment of her peril, however vaguely outlined. So much the better for our purpose; and, as I had already declared this belief to Marian, I did not interrupt her.

She continued:

"When you have read this, do not show it to any one. Do not make known its contents even to—"

The maiden paused for a moment. Filial affection, too cruelly crushed, was causing her voice to falter. Tremblingly and low muttered came the words:

"Our father!—Dear Lil!" proceeded she in a firmer tone, "you know how dearly I loved you? I love you still the same. You know I would have risked my life to save yours. I now risk that and more—ah! far more, if I could tell you; but some time you shall know all. And you, dear Lil! your danger is even greater than of life—for it is the danger of dishonor! Hear me, then, beloved sister, and do not refuse to follow my advice! When it is dark—and to-night if possible—steal out from the camp. Separate yourself from the vile people who surround you—separate yourself—oh sister! it is hard to say the word—from him, our father—him who should have been our protector, but who, I fear—"

Alas! I cannot speak the thought. To-night, dear Lil! if possible, to-night! To-morrow it may be too late. Our disguise may be discovered, and all our plans frustrated. To-night—to-night! Fear not! your friend awaits you—as also your old favorite, Frank Wingrove, with other brave companions. Your sister will receive you with open arms."

"MARIAN."

Our next anxiety was, as to how the note might be delivered. Time was too valuable to be wasted. Already had the sun sunk to rest over the grand desert of the Colorado; and the somber shadows of the Sierra San Juan were projected far into the plain—almost to the edge of the encampment. In these latitudes, the soft eve lingers but a few minutes; and night was already spreading her russet mantle over the earth. The white tilts of the wagons gleamed paler through the gray light; and the red glare of the camp-fires, burning within the corral, now shone upon the canvas—disputing the power to illuminate it, with the last touches of the twilight. Another minute—scarcely another minute—and the day would be done.

"Come!" I said to my companion, "we may go together. The guide has proclaimed us sister and brother—prophetic words, I hope. Believing in that relationship, these people will not see anything extraordinary in our taking a stroll together. Outside the camp, we may find the opportunity we are in search of."

Marian offered no objection; and, issuing together from the tent, we proceeded in the direction of the corralled wagons.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A CARAVAN BALL.

As if to favor our design, the night descended dusk as the wing of a vulture.

It was, moreover, the hour of most interest in the daily routine of a traveling-train: when forms cluster around the bivouac fire, and bright faces shine cheerfully in the blaze; when the song succeeds the supper, the tale is told, and the merry laugh rings on the air; when the pipe sends up its aromatic wreaths of blue curling smoke; and sturdy limbs, already rested from the toils of the day, feel an impulse to spring upward on the "light fantastic toe." On that eve, such an impulse had inspired the limbs of the Mormon emigrants.

Scarcely had the *debris* of the supper been removed ere a space was cleared midway between the blazing fires; music swelled upon the air—he sounds of fiddle, horn and clarionet—and half a score of couples, setting themselves *en quadrille*, commenced treading time to the tune. Sufficiently *bizarre* was the exhibition—a dance of the true "broad-horn" breed; but we had no thought of criticising an entertainment so opportune to our purpose. The swelling sound of the instruments drowning low conversation—the confusion of many voices—the attraction of the saltatory performance—were all circumstances that had suddenly and unexpectedly arisen in our favor. My companion and I had no longer a fear that our movements would be noted.

Our eyes, wandering over the different figures, soon became fixed upon two. They were men, and seated near each other, and some paces apart from the crowd of dancers.

They were Holt and Stebbins.

Both were by the side of a large fire, that threw its red light in full glare over them—so that not only their figures, but even the expression upon their features we could distinctly trace. The squatter, pipe in mouth, and with head drooping down almost to his knees, looked grimly into the fire. He was paying no attention to what was passing around him. His thoughts were not there. Stebbins, on the other hand, appeared eagerly to watch the dancers. He was dressed with a degree of adornment, and exhibited a certain patronizing attitude as if master of the sports and ceremonies! Men and women went and came, as if paying court to him, and each was kept for a moment in courtly converse, and then graciously dismissed, with all the ludicrous etiquette of mock ceremonial.

I looked among the dancers—scrutinizing each face as it came round to the light. There were girls and women—some of all ages. But Lillian? I was disappointed in not seeing her—a disappointment that gratified me. Where was she? Among the spectators? I made a hurried examination of the circle. There were faces fair and young—white teeth and rose-hued cheeks—but not hers. She was not among them! I turned to her sister to make a conjectural inquiry. I saw that the eyes of Marian were fixed upon her father. She was regarding him with a singular expression. I could fancy that some strange reflection was passing through her mind—some wild emotion swelling within her bosom. I refrained from interrupting the current of her thoughts.

Up to this time the wagon beside which we stood had been dark inside. Suddenly, and as if by magic, a light flashed within, gleaming through the translucent canvas. A candle had been lighted under the tilt, and now continued to burn steadily. I could not resist the temptation to look under the canvas. Perhaps a presentiment guided me? It needed no disarrangement of the cover. I had only to step a pace to one side and opposite the curtain in the rear of the vehicle. The slight rude hanging had been negligently closed. An interstice left open between the two flaps permitted a full view of the interior.

A number of large boxes and articles of household use filled up the bed of the wagon. Over these had been thrown some coarse garments and pieces of bed-clothing—blankets, counterpanes, and a bolster or two. Near the forward end a chest of large dimensions stood higher than the rest, and upon the lid of this a piece of tallow-candle was burning in the neck of an old bottle. Between the flame of the candle and my eyes a figure intervened, shadowing the rearward part of the wagon.

It was a female figure; and dim as was the light, I could trace the outlines of a lovely *silhouette*, that could be no other than Lillian Holt.

A slight movement of the head brought the gleam of golden hair under the flickering flame, and the features were seen *en profile*. They were hers.

It was Lillian who occupied the wagon. She was alone, though in front of the vehicle I could see forms not distant from where she sat. Young men were loitering there. Ardent glances were directed

toward her. She appeared desirous of shunning them. She held in her hands a book. One might have fancied she was reading it; for it was open. But the light fell sparingly on the page, and her stealthy glances toward it told something else than the book was occupying her attention. A piece of detached paper that gleamed whiter between the leaves, was evidently the object of her solicitude. It was the writing upon that she was trying to decipher. I watched with eager glance. I noted every movement of the fair reader. Marian had joined me. We both watched together.

It required an effort to restrain ourselves from speech. A word would have been worth all this writing; but it might also have ruined everything. They who stood in front of the wagon might hear that word. It was not spoken. Lillian was evidently embarrassed by the presence of these young men, and cast uneasy glances toward them as she read. Perhaps the restraint thus placed upon her hindered any violent show of emotion which the writing on the paper might have called forth. A short suppressed sigh, as she finished reading; a quick searching glance among the groups in front—another shot stealthily toward the rear of the wagon—this was all in her manner that might have appeared unusual.

I waited till her eyes were again turned rearward; and then, gently parting the canvas flaps, I held Marian's note between my fingers inside the curtain. The apparition of my red hand did not cause an alarm. The poem had paved the way for the more prosaic epistle, and neither scream nor start was occasioned by its delivery. As soon as I saw that the piece of paper was observed, I dropped it among the boxes and withdrew my hand. The fear that we might have been noticed standing too long in one place influenced us to move away. If fortune should favor the reading of that note, on our return we might find our scheme much more ripe for execution. With this reflection, we glided silently from the spot.

CHAPTER LXV.

TO HORSE AND AWAY.

OUR absence was of short duration—a turn to the tents and back again. While there, I had spoken a word to Wingrove and Sure-shot. I had warned my comrades not to picket our horses at too great a distance from the tents; as we knew not how soon we might need them.

To seek an interview, we return a second time to the rear of the wagons. The candle was yet burning under the tilt. Its flame feebly illuminated the canvas. We drew near with stealthy tread, taking notice that we were not observed. We stood once more by the end of the huge vehicle. We were raising our eyes to look through the curtain, when at that instant the light went out. Some one had suddenly extinguished it. One might have regarded this as an ill omen; but, the moment after, we could hear a slight rustling sound, as of some one moving under the cover of the wagon, and passing along toward its hinder end. We stood silent, listening to the sound. It ceased at length; but, immediately after, the edge of the curtain was raised slowly, and without noise. A face appeared in the opening. There was scarcely any light; but even through the grim darkness that lovely face gleamed soft and white. Marian stood nearest, and easily recognized it. In a tender tone she pronounced the magic word:

"Sister!"

"Oh Marian! sister! is it you?"

"Yes, dearest Lil! But hush! speak low!"

"Are you yet alive, dear Marian? or am I dreaming?"

"No dream, sister, but a reality."

"But he, dear sister? who is he that is with you?"

I stepped near enough to reply in a whisper:

"One, Lillian, who *thinks of thee*!"

"Oh sir! Edward!—Edward—it is you!"

"Hush!" whispered Marian, again interposing with a quick gesture of caution. "Speak only in whispers! Lillian!" continued she, in a firm tone, "you must fly with us!"

"From our father? Do you mean that, Marian?"

"From our father—ay, even from him!"

"Oh dear sister! what will he say? what will he do, if I forsake him?—Our poor father!"

There was anguish in the tones of her voice, that told of filial affection still strong and true, however much it may have been trampled upon.

"Say and do?" interrupted Marian. "He will rejoice—should rejoice—when he knows the danger from which you have escaped. Oh sister! dear sister! believe me—believe your own Marian! A fearful fate is before you. Flight with us can alone save you. Even father will soon be powerless to protect you, as he was to protect me. Do not hesitate then, but say you will go with us. Once beyond the reach of those villains who surround you, all will be well."

"And our father, Marian?"

"No harm will come to him. It is not his ruin they seek; but yours, sister, yours!"

A choking sigh was all the reply I could hear. It appeared to be a signal that the spell was broken: as if the heart had escaped from some thralldom in which it had been long held. Had the words of Marian produced conviction? or had they but confirmed some apprehension previously conceived? Was it the snapping of the filial thread I had heard in that anguished expression? Both the sigh and the silence that followed seemed to signify assent. To make more sure, I was about to add the influence of my intervention, with all the fervency of a lover's appeal. Wild words were upon my lips; when at that moment some strange interjections reached my ears, uttered within the inclosure. I stepped suddenly to one side, and looked over the wheels of the wagon.

There I beheld a spectacle that caused the blood to rush through my veins in quick quivering current. Marian saw it at the same time.

Holt had been seated near the fire, when seen but the moment before; but, as we now looked through, we saw that he had risen to his feet, and was standing in an attitude that betrayed some singular excitement. The cause was easily explained.

The dog Wolf was leaping up against his legs—uttering low growls of recognition, and making other demonstrations of joy. The animal had identified its old master! Despite the stained snout and

close-trimmed tonsure—despite both paint and shears—the dog had been also identified. Between him and his master the recognition was mutual. I saw this at a glance; and the speeches of the squatter only confirmed what was already evident to the eye.

"Hang me, ef 'tain't my ole dog!" cried he, "my ole dog Wolf! Hullo, Stebbins!" continued he, facing sharply round to the Saint; "what's the meanin' o' this? Didn't you tell me that he wur dead?"

Stebbins had turned pale as a sheet! and I could see his thin lips quivering with excitement. It was less fear than some other passion that was playing upon his features; and too easily could I conjecture the current of thought that was running through his brain. The presence of that animal must have called up a train of reflections, far wilder and stranger than those that were passing through the mind of the squatter; and I could perceive that he was making an effort to conceal his emotions.

"'Tis a very odd circumstance," said he, speaking in a tone of assumed surprise—"very odd indeed! It is your dog, certainly, though the animal has been disfigured. I thought he was dead. The men of our spring caravan told me so. They said that the wolves had killed him."

"Wolves! durn it, I mout 'a' know'd they kudn't 'a' killed him—not all the wolves on the parairies! Whar did he come from anyhow? Who's brought him hurr?"

I could see that Stebbins was desirous of parrying the question. He gave an evasive answer.

"Who knows! He has likely been in the hands of some Indians—the paint shows that—and preferring the company of whites, he has followed us, and strayed into the camp."

"Did he come with them 'ere Injuns that's outside?" quickly inquired Holt.

"No—I fancy not with them," answered the Mormon, in whose glance I could detect the falsehood.

"Let's go an' see!" proposed the squatter, making a step toward the entrance of the corral.

"No—not to-night, Holt!" hastily interposed the other, and with an eagerness that showed the interest he felt in procrastinating the inquiry. "We must not disturb them to-night. In the morning, we can see them, and learn all about it."

"Why not to-night, instead o' the mornin'?"

"Well—if you wish to know to-night, I'll go myself, and speak to the guide. No doubt, if the dog came with them, he can tell us all about it? You stay here till I return?"

"Don't be long then. Ho, Wolf! ole fellur! Injuns have had ye, eh? Blame it, old boy! I'm as gled to see ye, as if—"

An unexpected reflection was called forth by the form of speech—not that to which he was about to give words—but one whose bitterness not only hindered him from saying what he had intended, but caused him instantly to abandon his caresses of the dog. Staggering back to his seat, he dropped heavily down upon it—at the same time burying his face in his hands. The expression upon the Mormon's features, as he parted from the fire, was one of demoniac significance. Clearly he comprehended all! I saw him gliding off through the corral, with silent, stealthy tread, like some restless spirit of darkness. Here and there he paused; and for a moment held one in conversation—then quickly passing on to another. There was no mistaking the object of these maneuvers. As clearly as if declared, I divined their intent. He was summoning the "Destroyers!"

Not a moment was to be lost. I rushed back to the rear of the wagon, and with open arms gave utterance to my anguished appeal. But it needed not that; Marian had been before me.

Both she and her sister had witnessed the scene within the corral. Both already foresaw the coming storm; and ere my lips could close, after delivering the impassioned speech, Lillian Holt lay upon my bosom.

It was the first time that fair cheek had pressed upon my shoulder—the first time those soft arms had entwined around my neck. Not for an instant dared I indulge in the sweet embrace. If we lingered, it might be the last! To the tents—to the tents! I knew that the horses would be waiting. A signal already given should have warned my comrades; and I had no conjecture, no fear about their being in readiness.

As I expected, we found them all—both men and horses—the steeds saddled, bridled, and ready. The Mexican was there with the rest. The apparition of the dog had given him his cue; and he had hurriedly returned to the tents.

We thought not of these, nor of the other paraphernalia—neither our mules nor their packs. Our lives and liberty alone concerned us.

My Arab neighed joyfully as I sprang into the saddle. He was proud to carry that fairer form upon the croup; and, as he bounded forward over the plain, his triumphant snort told that he understood the glorious service he was called upon to perform.

As we parted from the tents, we could see a number of dark forms rushing out from the avenue. In the red glare their shadows were projected far over the plain, even in advance of our horses. They were the shadows of men afoot; and we soon galloped beyond them. The music had suddenly ceased, and the murmuring hum of the dancers had given place to shouts and loud cries that betokened a stampede in the camp.

We could distinguish the voices of men calling to the horse-guards; and soon after, the quick trampling of hoofs, as the animals were hurried up to the inclosure.

But we had very little uneasiness about the pursuit. We were too well mounted to fear being overtaken; and, as we galloped off into the night, with confidence could we echo the cry of the bold borderer:

"They'll have fleet steeds that follow!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

SEEKING A CACHE.

WE rode direct for Robideau's Pass. The night still continued dark, but we had no difficulty in finding our way. Even in the obscurity the deep trace

of the heavy emigrant train was sufficiently conspicuous, and we were enabled to follow the back track with precision.

Our experienced guide could have conducted us over it blindfold. That we were pursued, and hotly pursued, there could be little doubt. For my part, I felt certain of it.

The stake which Stebbins had hitherto held was too precious to be parted with on slight conditions. The jealous vigilance with which Lillian had been guarded along the route—amounting, as I had incidentally ascertained, to a positive espionage—her yellow duenna at once acting as spy and protectress—all were significant of the intent already suspected by us, but of which the young girl herself was perhaps happily ignorant.

The failure of his design—and now for the second time—would be a rude *contre-temps* for the pseudo-apostle, and would no doubt endanger his expected promotion.

Besides, he must have believed, or suspected, that Marian Holt still lived—that she had survived the exposure consequent on her escape from the first caravan—and this belief or suspicion would now be confirmed by the reappearance of the dog. Nay, it was almost certain that, on recognizing the animal, the truth had suddenly flashed upon him that Marian was herself upon the ground, and that the spotted countenance that had for the moment deceived him was that of his Tennessean bride. The abduction following upon the instant would not only confirm this belief but would redouble his eagerness in a pursuit that promised a recapture of both the victims who had thus unexpectedly escaped from his control.

Though with different motives, it was natural that Holt himself should be equally eager to pursue. He might still know nothing about the presence of Marian or her disguise.

To him it would simply appear that his other child had been stolen from the camp—carried off by Indians—and that should be sufficient to rouse him to the most strenuous efforts for her recovery. For these reasons we had no doubt about our being pursued, and with all the zeal and energy of which our apostolic enemy and his myrmidons were capable of putting forth.

Twenty miles separated the Mormon camp from the entrance to Robideau's Pass. Nearly the whole of that distance we traversed at a gallop. So far we had experienced no apprehension; but after entering the pass, our foaming horses began to show signs of fatigue. Those of Sure-shot and Wingrove, that were weaker than the rest, manifested symptoms of giving out. Both were evidently broken, and without rest could go no further.

This produced a new uneasiness.

We presumed that the horses of our pursuers would be comparatively fresh—after their long rest at their encampment—while ours had not only made a considerable journey the day before, but on that same day had passed over fifty miles of ground—twenty of it in a gallop. No wonder they were manifesting signs of distress.

Shortly after entering the pass, we drew up to deliberate. By continuing onward, we should be almost certain to be overtaken. This was the more probable, from the keen pursuit we had reason to anticipate. To remain where we were, would be to await the coming up of the enemy—no doubt in such number as would render our capture secure; and any attempt to defend ourselves would be idle as fatal. It was no longer with Indians we should have to deal—no longer with lances and arrows—but with strong bold men, armed like ourselves, but far outnumbering us. To conceal ourselves within the gorge, and permit our pursuers to pass, might have served our purpose for the time—had there been sufficient cover. But neither the rocks nor trees offered an advantageous hiding-place for our horses. The risk of their being discovered appeared too great. We dared not trust to such a slight chance of security. Within the pass, it was not possible to part from the trail; and on discovering the condition of our horses, we regretted not having left it before entering. We even entertained the question of returning some distance; since we might leave the trail by ascending a spur of the mountains in our rear. But this course appeared too perilous. Perhaps at that moment our pursuers might be entering the pass? Perhaps at that moment "adown the glen rode armed men"—though as yet our ears were not assailed by the sound of their trampling.

Fortunately, in this moment of hesitancy, a thought occurred to our Mexican comrade that promised to release us from the dilemma.

He remembered, on one of his trapping expeditions, having discovered a ravine that led out of Robideau's Pass on the northern side. It was a mere cleft cliff—just wide enough to admit the body of a man on horseback—but further up, it opened into a little plain or *vallon*, as the Mexican termed it, completely girt in by mountains. These on all sides rose so precipitously from the plains, as to render it impossible for a mounted man to scale them. The trapper had himself been obliged to return by the gorge—after having vainly endeavored to find a way leading outward above. The *vallon* was therefore a *cul-de-sac*; or, as the trapper in his native synonym called it, a *bolsón*.

Our guide was of opinion that this *bolsón* would serve as a hiding-place, until we could rest our horses. He was confident that the entrance of the ravine was not far from where we had halted; and, moreover that he should be able to find it without difficulty. His advice, therefore, was that we should seek the gorge; and, having found it, ride up into the *vallon*, and there remain till the following night. The pursuit might pass in the meantime, and return again; but whether or not, our animals would then be rested; and even should we again encounter the pursuers we might hope to escape, through the superior speed of our horses.

The plan was feasible. There was but one objection that struck me; and I offered it for the consideration of our guide. The *vallon*, as he had stated, was a *cul-de-sac*. Should we be tracked into it, there would be no chance of retreat; we should be taken as in a trap?

"*Carrambo!*" exclaimed the Mexican, in answer to my suggestion, "no fear of being tracked by such curs as they. They know nothing of that business. Not one of their whole fraternity could follow the track of a buffalo in snow-time. *Carrambo!* No."

"There is one who could," I replied; "one who could follow a feebler trail than ours."

"What! A *rastreador* among these *Judios*? Who, *cavallero*?"

"Their father!"

I whispered the reply, so that neither of the girls should overhear it.

"Oh, true," muttered the Mexican—"the father of the huntress—a hunter himself! *Currai*! that's like enough. But no matter. I can take you up the gorge in such fashion, that the most skilled *rastreador* of the prairies would never suspect we had passed through. Fortunately, the ground is favorable. The bottom of the little canyon is covered with cut rocks. The hoof will leave no mark upon these."

"Remember that some of our horses are shod; the iron will betray us?"

"No, *senor*, we shall muffle them; *nos vamos con los pies en medias*!" (Let us travel in stockings!)

The idea was not new to me; and without further hesitation, we proceeded to carry it into execution.

With pieces of blankets, and strips cut from our buckskin garments, we muffled the hoofs of our shod horses; and after following the wagon-trail, till we found a proper place for parting from it, we diverged in an oblique direction, toward the bluff that formed the northern boundary of the pass. Along this bluff we followed the guide in silence; and, after going for a quarter of a mile further, we had the satisfaction to see him turn to the left, and suddenly disappear from our sight—as if he had ridden into the face of the solid rock! We might have felt astonishment; but a dark chasm at the same instant came under our eyes, and we knew it was the ravine of which our guide had spoken. Without exchanging a word, we turned our horses' heads, and rode up into the cleft. There was water running among the shingle, over which our steeds trampled; but it was shallow, and did not hinder their advance. It would further aid in concealing their tracks—should our pursuers succeed in tracing us from the main route. But we had little apprehension of their doing this; so carefully had we concealed our trail on separating from that of the wagons.

On reaching the little *vallon*, we no longer thought of danger; but, riding on to its upper end, dismounted, and made the best arrangements that circumstances would permit of for passing the remainder of the night. Wrapped in buffalo-ropes, and a little apart from the rest of our party, the sisters reclined side by side under the canopy of a cottonwood tree. Long while had it been since these beautiful forms had reposed so near each other; and the soft, low murmur of their voices, heard above the sighing of the breeze, and the rippling sound of the mountain rills, admonished us that each was confiding to the other the sweet secret of her bosom!

CHAPTER LXVII.

UN PARAISO.

We come to the closing act of our drama.

To understand it fully, it is necessary that the setting of the stage—the *mise-en-scene*—be described with a certain degree of minuteness.

The little valley-plain, or *vallon*, in which we had cached ourselves, was not over three hundred yards in length, and of an elliptical form. But for this form, it might have resembled some ancient crater scooped out of the mountain, that on all sides swept upward around it. The sides of this mountain, trending up from the level of the plain, rose not with a gentle acclivity, but with precipitous abruptness. At no point, however, did it assume the character of a cliff. It might have been scaled with difficulty by a man on foot, especially should he avail himself of the assistance of the trees—pines and trailing junipers—that grew over the steep so thickly as to conceal the greater portion of its rocky *facade*. Here and there only a bare spot might be observed, a little buttress of white laminated gypsum, mingled with sparkling selenite; while at other places a miniature torrent, leaping over the rocks, and dancing among the dark cedars, presented a very similar appearance. These little torrents, plunging down to the plain, formed numerous crystal rills that traversed the *vallon*. Like the branches of a silver candelabrum, all united near its center, and there formed a pellucid stream that, sweeping onward, discharged itself through the ravine into Robideau's Pass.

The effect of this abundance of water had been to produce within the *vallon* a proportionate luxuriance of vegetation, though it had not assumed the form of a forest. A few handsome cottonwoods, standing thinly over it, were the only trees; but the surface exhibited a verdure of emerald brightness enameled by many a gay corolla—born to blush unseen within this sweet, secluded glen. Along the edge of the rivulet, large water-plants projected their broad leaves languidly over the stream; and where the little cascades came down from the rocks, the flowers of beautiful orchids, and other rare epiphytes, were seen sparkling under the spray—many of them clinging to the *coniferae*, and thus uniting almost the extreme types of the botanical world!

Such lovely landscape was presented to our eyes in the "bolson" into which our trapper-guide had conducted us. It appeared lovely as we first beheld it, under the blue light of dawn; but lovelier far when the sun began to tinge the summits of the Mojada Mountains that encircled it, and scatter his empurpled roses on the snowy peaks of the Wato-yah, just visible through the gorge.

"*Es un Paraíso!*" (It is a Paradise!) exclaimed the Mexican, warming with the poetry of his race. "*En verdad un Paraíso!* Even better peopled than the Paradise of old. *Mira! cavalleros!*" continued he. "Behold! not one Eve, but two! each, I dare say, as beautiful as the mother of mankind!"

As the trapper spoke, he pointed to the young girls, who, hand-in-hand, were returning from the stream. The spots of *allergia* had disappeared from the cheeks of Marian, that now gleamed in all their crimson picturesqueness. It was for Wingrove to admire these. My own eyes were riveted upon the rosette blonde; and, gazing upon her face, I could not help echoing the sentiment of the enthusiastic speaker: "Beautiful as the mother of mankind!"

Wingrove and I had been to the *lavatory* before them, and had succeeded to a certain extent in scouring our skins clear of the vermilion bedaubment. In the anticipation of this pleasant interview, it was

natural we should seek to rescue ourselves from a disguise that the eye of woman could not look upon otherwise than with *dégoût*. It was natural, too, we should desire those clasped hands to come asunder—those maiden forms to be separated from one another?

Fortune was pleased to respond to our wishes. A flower hanging from the branch of a tree at that moment caught the eye of Lillian; and, dropping her sister's hand, she hastened to gather it. Marian, who cared less for flowers, did not follow her. Perhaps her inclination tempted her the other way? But one did follow the fair Lillian, unable to resist the opportunity for free converse, the only one that had offered since that first sweet interview.

How my heart bounded when I beheld the blossom of the bignonia, for it was that which hung drooping from the branch of the cottonwood, round which its bright leaves were amorously entwining. How it swelled with a triumphant joy when I saw those tiny fingers extend toward the flower, gently pluck it from the stem and place it upon my bosom! Talk of bliss, if it be not this! We strayed on through the straggling trees, along the banks of the stream, by the edges of the little rills. We wandered around the *vallon* and stood by the torrents that fell foaming from the rocks. We mingled our voices with the waters, whose low murmurings appeared to repeat the sentiment so endeared to us, "I think of thee!"

"And you will, Lillian—you will always thus think of me?"

"Yes, Edward!—for ever and ever!"

Was the kiss unhallowed that could seal such promise? No—it was sacred—

Down to Earth's profound,
And up to Heaven!

Thus benighted with the sweet hallucination of love, how could we dream that on earth there existed an alloy? How suspect that into that smiling garden the dread serpent could ever intrude himself? Alas! he was at that moment approaching it—he was already near!

The place we had chosen for our temporary bivouac—and where we had passed the night—was at the upper extremity of the little valley, and close in to the cliff. We had selected this spot from the ground being a little more elevated than the general surface, and in consequence drier. Several cottonwood trees shaded it, and it was further sheltered by a number of large boulders of rock, that, having fallen from the cliff above, lay near its base. Behind these boulders the men of our party had slept—not from any idea of the greater security afforded by them, but simply from a delicate motive—being thus separated from the chamber occupied by our fair *protégées*.

It had never occurred to us that our place of concealment could be discovered in the night; and, even long after the day had arisen, so confident did we continue in our fancied security, that we had taken no precautions—neither to reconnoiter the cliffs in search of a way of retreat, nor to adopt any means of defense in the event of our being assailed. As far as Wingrove and I were concerned, I have explained this negligence, for it was negligence of the most imprudent character. The Mexican, feeling quite certain that he had succeeded in blinding our trail, was perhaps less cautious than he might otherwise have been, and Sure-shot equally trusted to his new comrade, for whose skill the ex-ranger had conceived an exalted opinion.

I could see withal that Archilete was not without some apprehension. He had buckled on his artificial leg, the real one having become fatigued by pressing too long on the stirrup; and, as he hobbled over the ground, I noticed that from time to time he cast inquiring glances down the valley. Observing these signs of impatience more than once, I began to grow uneasy.

Prudence required that even that sweet scene should be interrupted—only temporarily, I hoped—until some plan should be adopted that would render us more secure against the contingency of our being discovered. With my fair companion I had turned away from the sweet whisperings of the cascade, and was facing to the upper end of the *vallon*, when all at once I observed a strange maneuver on the part of "Peg-leg."

The trapper had thrown himself flat upon the grass, and with his ear placed close to the ground, appeared to listen! The movement was too significant not to attract the attention of everybody. My companion was the only one who did not comprehend it; but she observed that it had powerfully affected all the others, and an ejaculation of alarm escaped her as she saw them hastening up to the place occupied by the prostrate trapper.

But before we could arrive on the spot the man had sprung back into an erect attitude; and, as he stamped his timber leg with violence upon the ground, was heard to exclaim:

"*Currambo, camarados!* The curs are upon our trail! *Oiga los!—el perro—el perro!*" (You hear them?—the dog—the dog!)

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when their interpretation was given in the sound that came pealing up the valley.

Borne upon the sighing breeze, it was heard above the rushing noise of the waters—easily heard, and as easily understood. It was the bay of a dog who ran growling along the trail! Its deep tone was even identified. The huntress recognized it in the first note that fell upon her ear, as was evidenced by her quick exclamation:

"Wolf! my dog Wolf!"

The speech had scarcely escaped her before the dog himself made his appearance, convincing us all of his identity. The animal, seeing us, ran no longer by the scent, but with raised snout came galloping across the valley and bounded forward to receive the caresses of his mistress.

We rushed to our weapons; and having grasped them, ran behind the boulders of rock. It would have been idle to have taken to our horses. If our pursuers were following the dog, and and guided by him, they would already be near enough to intercept our retreat from the *vallon*. Perhaps they were at that moment in the gorge? We had but one hope; and that was, that the dog might be alone. Missing Marian at the camp, he might have struck upon her trail, and been running upon it throughout the night? This seemed scarcely

probable; for Holt could have detained him, and in all likelihood would have done so?

Still less probable did it appear, as we watched the movements of the dog himself. Instead of staying by Marian, and continuing to receive her caresses, we noticed that at short intervals he ran off again, making demonstration in the direction he had come—as if in expectation of some one who was following at his heels.

The slight hope we had conceived was quickly and rudely crushed, by the confirmation of this fact. The voices of men, echoing hoarsely through the gorge, confirmed it! Beyond doubt, they were our pursuers, guided by the dog—who little comprehended the danger he was thus conducting toward the object of his instinctive affections.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED DEFECTION.

ALMOST as soon as we heard the voices, we saw those who were giving utterance to them. A horseman appeared issuing from the jaws of the chasm—another, and another—until eight had filed into the open ground! They were all armed men—armed with guns, pistols and knives. He in the lead was at once identified. The colossal stature, the green blanket coat, red shirt, and kerchief turban, proclaimed that the foremost of our pursuers was Holt himself. Immediately behind him rode Stebbins; while those following in file were the executive myrmidons of the Mormon faith—the *Destroying Angels*!

On entering the open ground, Holt alone kept on without slackening his speed. Stebbins followed, but more cautiously and at a distance of several lengths of his horse.

The Danites at sight of our animals, and ourselves too—for they could not fail to see our faces over the rocks—drew up; not suddenly, but one after the other—as if irresolute whether to advance, or remain where they were. Even Stebbins, though moving on after the squatter, did so with evident reluctance. He saw the barrels of our rifles gleaming above the boulders; and, when within about fifty paces of our position, he too reined in—keeping the body of Holt between himself and our guns.

The squatter continued to advance, without the slightest show of fear. So near had he got to us, that we could note the expression upon his features, though it was difficult to understand it. It was one that bespoke reckless determination—no doubt a determination to recover his child from the savages who had stolen her; for as yet he had no reason to think otherwise than that we were Indians.

Of course, none of us thought of firing upon Holt; but, had Stebbins at the moment advanced only a step nearer, there was more than one rifle ready to give out its deadly detonation.

Holt approached rapidly, his horse going a trot. He held his long gun obliquely in front of him, and grasped in both hands—as if ready to fire on the instant.

All at once, he checked his horse, dropped the gun on the pommel of his saddle, and sat gazing toward us with a look of bewildered surprise.

White faces appearing over the rocks instead of red ones, had caused this sudden change in his demeanor.

Before he had time to give utterance to his astonishment, Lillian glided from behind the boulder, and standing with arms extended, cried out:

"Oh father! they are not Indians! It is Marian! it is—" At the same instant her sister appeared by her side.

"Marian alive!" cried Holt, recognizing his long-lost daughter. "My child Marian yet livin'! God be praised! Thur's one weight off o' my poor soul—an' now to eeze it o' another!"

As he uttered the last words, he wrenched his horse half around, and dropped to his feet upon the nearer side. Then, quickly resting his rifle over the hollow of the saddle, he brought its barrel to bear upon the breast of Stebbins—who still sat upon horseback, scarce twenty paces distant from its muzzle.

"Now, Josh Stebbins!" cried the squatter in a voice of thunder, "the time's come to squar' the yards wi' you!"

"What do you mean, Holt?" mechanically inquired the Mormon, in trembling surprise. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, you infernal skunk, that afore ye leave this groun', ye've got to make a clean breast o' it, and cl'ar me o' the crime o' murder."

"What murder?" inquired Stebbins, prevaricatingly.

"Oh! you know what I'm talkin' about! 'Twa'n't no murder. 'Twar only a suicide; an' Ged knows it broke my own heart."

Holt's voice was husky with emotion.

He continued after a pause:

"For all o' that, appearances wur ag'in' me; an' you invented proofs that w'd 'a' stoed good among lawyers, though thur as false as y'ur own black heart. Ye've kep' 'm over me for years, to sarve yer rascally designs. But thur's neither law nor lawyers hyur to help you any longer. Thur's witnesses o' both sides—y'ur own beauties down yander; an' some hyur o' a better sort, I reck'n. Afore them, I call on ye to declar' that y'ur proofs wur false, an' that I'm innocent o' the crime o' murder!"

There was a profound silence when the speaker finished. The strange and unexpected nature of the demand, held every one in breathless surprise. Even the armed men at the bottom of the *vallon* said not a word; and perceiving that, by the defection of Holt, there was almost gun for gun against them, they showed no signs of advancing to the protection of their apostolic leader.

The latter appeared for a moment to vacillate. The fear depicted upon his features was blended with an expression of the most vindictive bitterness, as that of a tyrant forced to yield up some despotic privilege which he has long wielded. True, it mattered little to him now. The intended victims of his vile contrivance—whatever it may have been—were likely to escape from his control in another way; but, for all that, he seemed loth to part with even the shadow of his former influence.

He was not allowed much time for reflection; scarce the opportunity to look round upon his Danites, which, however, he did—glancing back as if desirous of retreating toward them.

"Stan' y'ur groun'," shouted the squatter in a tone of menace; "stan' your groun'! Don't dar-

to turn y'ur face from me! Ef ye do ye'll only get the bullet in y'ur back. Now confess! or, by the eternal God! you hain't another second to sit in that saddle!"

The quick, threatening manner in which the speaker grasped his gun told Stebbins that prevarication would be idle. In hurried speech he replied: "You committed no murder, Hickman Holt. I never said you did."

"No, but you said you would, and you invented proofs o' it? Confess you invented proofs, an' kep' 'em over my head like a black shadder? Confess that!"

Stebbins hesitated.

"Quick, or ye're a dead man!"

"I did," muttered the guilty wretch, trembling as he spoke.

"An' the proofs wur false?"

"They were false—I confess it."

"Enuf!" cried Holt, drawing down his gun. "Enuf for me! An' now, ye cowardly snake, ye may go wi' y'ur beauties yander. They'll not like ye a bit the wuss for all this. Ye may go—an' carry y'ur conscience along wi' ye—ef that'll be any comfort to ye. Away wi' ye!"

"No!" exclaimed a voice from behind, and at the same time Wingrove was seen stepping out from the rock. "Not yet adzactly. I've got a score to settle wi' the skunk. The man who'd plot that way ag'in' another hain't ought to live. You may let him off, Hick Holt, but I won't; nor w'u'd you eyther, I reck'n, if you knew—"

"Knew what?" interrupted the squatter.

"What he intended for your daughter."

"He air my daughter's husband," rejoined Holt in a tone that betokened a mixture of bitterness and shame. "That was my fault; God forgi' me!"

"He ain't her husband—nothin' o' the kind. The marriage was a sham. He war takin' poor Marian out thar for a diff'rent purpose—an' Lilian too."

"For what purpose?" cried Holt, a new light seeming suddenly to break upon his mind.

"To make—" answered Wingrove hesitatingly.

"I cannot say the word, Hick Holt, in presence o' the girls—to make wives to the Mormon Prophet; that's what he intended wi' both o' 'em."

The scream that, like the neigh of an angry horse, burst from the lips of the squatter, drowned the last words of Wingrove's speech, and simultaneously the report of a rifle pealed upon the air.

A cloud of smoke for a moment enveloped Holt and his horse, from the midst of which came a repetition of that wild, vengeful cry. At the same instant the steed of Stebbins was seen running riderless down the valley, while the Saint himself lay stretched, face upward, upon the sward! His body remained motionless.

He was dead—a purple spot on his forehead showing where the fatal bullet had entered the brain!

The sisters had just time to shelter themselves behind the rocks when a volley from the Danites was poured upon us.

Their shots fell harmlessly around, while ours, fired in return, had been better aimed, and another of these fearful men, dropping out of his saddle, yielded up his life upon the spot.

The remaining five, seeing that the day had gone against them, wheeled suddenly about, and galloped back down the gorge, ten times faster than they had ridden up it.

It was the last we saw of the *Destroying Angels*!

"Oh my children!" cried Holt, in a supplicating tone, as he staggered forward and received both within his outstretched embrace, "will ye—can ye forgi' me? Oh God! I've been a bad father to ye, but I knew not the wickedness o' these Mormon people. No—nor half o' his till it war too late; an' now—"

"And now, father," said Marian, interrupting his contrite speech with a consoling smile, "speak not of forgiveness! There is nothing to forgive, and perhaps not much to regret, since the perils we have gone through have proved our fidelity to one another. We shall return home all the happier, having escaped from so many dangers, dear father!"

"Ah, Marian, gurl, you don't know all; we hev now no home to go to."

"The same you ever had," interposed I, "if you will consent to accept it. The old cabin on Mud Creek will hold us all till we can build a larger one. But no," I added, correcting myself, "I see two here who will scarcely feel inclined to share its hospitality. Another cabin, higher up the creek, will be likely to claim them for its tenants."

Marian blushed, while the young backwoodsman, although turning equally red at the allusion, had the courage to stammer out that he always "thort his cabin war big enough for two."

"Stranger," said Holt, turning to me and frankly extending his hand, "I've much to be ashamed o', an' much to thank ye for; but I accept y'ur kind offer. You bought the land, an' I'd return ye the money ef 't hadn't been all spent. I thort I c'u'd 'a' made up for it by gi'ing ye somethin' ye mout 'a' liked better. Now I see I can't even gi' ye that somethin', since it appears to be yourn 'a' ready. Ye've won her, stranger, an' ye've got her. All I kin now do is to say that from the bottom o' my heart I consent to y'ur keepin' her."

"Thanks—thanks!"

Lilian was mine forever.

The curtain falls upon our drama; and brief must be the epilogue.

To scenes warlike and savage succeeded those of a pacific and civilized character—as the turbulent torrent, debouching from its mountain channel, flows in tranquil current through the alluvion of the level plain.

By our Utah allies, whom we encountered on the following day, we were "outfitted" for recrossing the prairies—the abandoned wagon, with a team of Indian mules, affording a proper means of transport.

Not without regret did we part with the friendly Mexican trapper, and our brave associates, the ex-riflemen and ex-infantry.

We had afterward the gratification to learn that the scapless man survived his terrible mutilation; that under the protection of Peg-leg, he and Sure-shot were taken to the valley of Taos—whence, along with the next migration of "diggers," they

proceeded, by the Colorado, to the golden placers of California.

To detail the incidents of our homeward journey, were a pleasant task for the pen; but the record would scarcely interest the reader.

The colossal squatter, silent but cheerful, drove the wagon, and busied himself about the management of his mules. The young backwoodsman and I were thus left free to interchange with our respective "sweethearts" these phrases of delicious endearment—those glances of exquisite sweetness, that only pass between eyes illuminated by the light of a mutual love. Proverbially sweet is the month after marriage; but the honeymoon, with all its joys, could not have exceeded in bliss those antenuptial hours spent by us in recrossing the prairies.

Clear as the sky over our heads was the horoscope of our hearts; all doubt and suspicion had passed away; not a shadow lingered upon the horizon of our future, to dim the perfect happiness we enjoyed. In our case, the delight of anticipation could not be enhanced by actual possession, since we had possession already.

We arrived safely in Swampville. In the post-office of that interesting village a letter awaited me, of which "jet-black was de seal." Under ordinary circumstances this should have cast a gloom upon my joy; but candor forces me to confess that a perusal of the contents of that epistle produced upon me an effect altogether the reverse.

The letter announced the demise of an octogenarian female relative—whom I had never seen—but who, for a full decade of years beyond the period allotted to the life of man—or woman either—had obstinately persisted in standing betwixt me and a small reversion—so long, indeed, that I had ceased to regard it as an "expectation."

It was of no great amount; but, arriving just then in the very "nick o' time," was doubly welcome; and under its magical influence, a large quantity of superfluous timber soon disappeared from the banks of Mud Creek.

Ah! the squatter's clearing, with its zigzag fence, its girdled trees, and white dead-woods. It is no longer recognizable. The log-hut is replaced by a pretentious frame-dwelling with portico and verandas—almost a mansion. The little maize-patch, scarcely an acre in extent, is now a splendid plantation of many fields, in which wave the golden tassels of the Indian corn, the broad leaves of another indigenous vegetable—the aromatic "Indian weed," and the gossamer-like florets of the precious cotton-plant.

Even the squatter himself you would scarcely recognize in the respectable old gentleman, who, mounted upon his cob, with a long rifle over his shoulder, rides around, looking after the affairs of the plantation, and picking off the squirrels, who threaten the young corn with their destructive depredations.

It is not the only plantation upon Mud Creek. A little further up the stream another is met with—almost equally extended, and cultivated in like manner.

Need I say who is the owner of this last?

Who should it be but the young backwoodsman—now transformed into a prosperous planter? The two estates are contiguous, and no jealous fence separates the one from the other. Both extend to that flowery glade, of somewhat sad notoriety, whose bordering woods are still undefined by the ax.

Not there, but in another spot, alike flowery and pleasant, the eye of the soaring eagle, looking from aloft, may see united together a joyous group—the owners of the two plantations—with their young wives, Marian and Lilian.

The sisters are still in the full bloom of their incomparable beauty. In neither is the maiden yet subdued into the matron—though each beholds her own type reflected in more than one bright face smiling by her side; while more than one little voice lisps sweetly in her ear that word of fond endearment—the first that falls from human lips.

Ah! beloved Lilian! thine is not a beauty born to blush but for an hour. In my eyes it can never fade; but, like the blossom of the citron, seems only the fairer by the side of its own fruit! I leave it to other lips to symbol the praises of thy sister—THE WILD HUNTRESS.

THE END.

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